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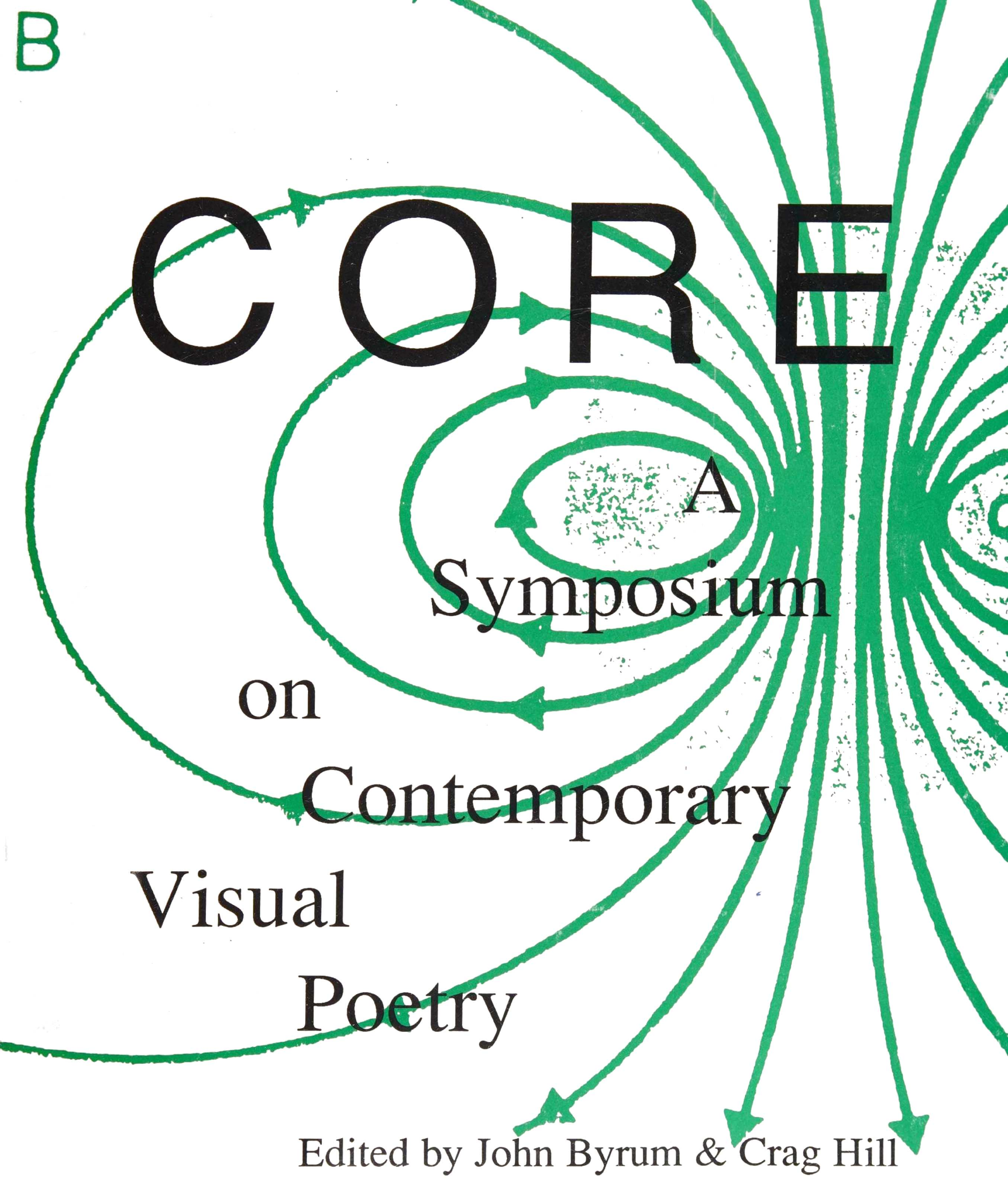

CORE

A Symposium on Contemporary Visual Poetry

Edited by John Byrum & Crag Hill

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GENERATORSCORE Press

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CORE: A Symposium on Contemporary Visual Poetry

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INTRODUCTION

CORE consists of materials sent in response to a questionnaire on visual poetry developed and distributed by Crag Hill and John Byrum. The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 200 people in several countries whose efforts have been largely concerned with visual poetry. Nearly all of the respondents consider at least some of their literary work as visual poetry or visual literature.

The responses constitute a core sample of the issues, methods, and practices of contemporary visual poetry, and of the respondents' perceptions regarding its situation within contemporary culture. Respondents were encouraged to deal with the 'spirit' of the issues raised by the questionnaire as much as with the particular questions themselves.

The numbered sections of many of the responses in this volume correspond to the numbered questions from the questionnaire.

CORE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What qualities or characteristics distinguish 'visual poetry' from other poetic productions?
2. How do the 'visual' or 'graphic' elements in your work come to be 'read' as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers? Do you notice any contradictions, gaps, etc., which you must bridge in order to think the notion 'visual poetry'?
3. How do the kinds of meaning communicated by language occur/inhere in visual poetry, and, how do the kinds of meaning communicated in visual art occur in visual poetry? In other words, in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?
4. Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'?
5. Which particular works or creators of visual poetry do you feel a kinship with in your own work?
6. Do you participate in a community (or communities) of visual poets? If so, who and how?
7. Who is your audience?
8. What do you think are the primary forums for your work? (For example, literary magazines, experimental publications, gallery shows, etc.)
9. What do you judge to be the relevance of visual poetry to:
   a. prior (historical) poetic practice
   b. contemporary poetic practice
   c. contemporary socioeconomic and/or political situations?

   In other words, how does visual poetry relate to your sense of our 'historic' and 'current situation'?
10. What values or benefits does/could/should visual poetry have in relation to our current situation? What does it bring to the world of those who view/read it?
11. What percentage of your income is derived from your visual poetry work (including teaching, critical writing, etc.)? What percentage of that income is derived from government or private (i.e. corporate or foundation) grants?
12. Do you think visual poetry should be subsidized by government and/or private grants?

WHAT IS VISUAL POETRY?

Language seems to have evolved first as a method of communication using articulated sounds produced by the passing of breath over the vocal chords, through the structures of the oral cavity, and out the mouth. Much later, this spoken form of communication was translated, or transcribed, into systems of written (i.e. visual) communication. Thus, language has come to exist for us in the dual modes of spoken and written communications.

Our modern conception of poetry as a specialized form of language communication (both spoken and written) traces its origins to pre-literate times when the entire body of a sociocultural group's shared knowledge was handed down from generation to generation by the singers of tales through repeated public performance. With the introduction of systems of transcription, these aural tales retained many of the mnemonic compositional devices used by the singers in their performances, such as systems of regular beats, repeated sound structures (alliteration, rhymes, verse structures, etc.), and the character of the stories themselves, which we comprehend today as mythic. As language use evolved and differentiated, the notion of the 'poetic', once all-encompassing, became an ever more specialized, and finally marginalized, mode of discourse. This "differentiation" of language use, begun with the initial translation of the spoken word into the written word, made possible the increasing 'rationalization' of human thought and thus knowledge, and led through the transcription of myth into religion, and then religion's increasing rationalization into more objective modes of inquiry, which eventually led to the formation of the 'scientific' modes of thought based on a mythos of objectivity and the testing of "hypotheses" through the accumulation of experimentally verified "data".

Through all these differentiated uses of spoken and written language, poetry remained as an increasingly distant memory of the origins of language itself. It survives today as a perhaps degraded memory of a perhaps 'useless', and certainly archaic, mode of awareness. Today, poetry retains compression, feeling, multiple levels of meanings, the use of metaphor to reconnect previously separated fields, a striving after an all-but-lost intuition of connection with the Other (the Infinite), and perhaps a certain form of inutility (at least in terms of the now-dominant rationalist/positivist and entertainment modes of discourse), as its distinguishing characteristics.

Simply put, visual poetry emphasizes the visual aspect of the poetic production over the aural aspect. Its look over its sound. In addition, visual poetry often incorporates graphic elements and images in conjunction with the written signs of languages, and thus shades into the traditions of the visual arts.

Obviously, every written communication has a visual aspect. Visual poetry emphasizes that aspect and incorporates it into its meaningful content. This is not a new phenomenon. Without unduly stretching a point, it can be asserted that the beginnings of visual poetry are coterminous with the beginnings of written language itself. Prehistoric cave painting, pictographs, hieroglyphics and Chinese ideographs are all examples of ancient visual modes of writing. The later development of written languages based on orthographic "transcriptions" of the sound of spoken languages tended to de-emphasize the visual element in favor of the aural. Yet even these modes of writing have produced practitioners who have incorporated the visual aspects of their written language as an aspect of their work.

Visual aspects of poetry are in evidence as a separable strain of the Western and Islamic poetic traditions since at least 300 B.C. For an excellent general introduction to this subject see Dick Higgins, *George Herbert's Pattern Poems: In Their Tradition*, Unpublished Editions, West Glover, Vermont and New York, New York, 1977.

The 20th century has produced an explosion of the visual in literary and poetic practice. The many and various avant-gardes of poetry and the visual and performing arts, such as dada, futurist and surrealist poetry, Fluxus, and particularly the international concrete poetry and mail art movements, are the immediate antecedents of the contemporary visual literature and poetry which is the subject of this book.

Very few anthologies of visual literature have been published. Perhaps the best known of these is Mary Ellen Solt's *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, first published in 1968 by Indiana University Press. Other than Richard Kostelanetz's *Visual Lit Crit: A New Criticism*, published in 1979, few attempts have been made to gather the multiple perspectives on visual literature into some sort of critical overview. The task of publishing visual literature has largely been taken up by a multitude of small press publications, primarily in North and South America and Europe, but also in Russia (for example, the Samizdat authors and artists of the 1960s and 70s), Japan and India.

After the international concrete poetry movement of the 1950s and 60s all but died out, and the international mail art movement lost momentum through the 1970s, new forms of visual literature and poetry did not begin to re-surface until the 1980s. The poets and writers collected in this volume have all participated in and helped to shape this latest wave of visual literature and visual poetry.

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BORY, JEAN-FRANCOIS, *Once Again*, New Directions, 1968.

BOWLES, JERRY G. & RUSSELL, TONY, editors, *This Book is a Movie: An Exhibition of Language Art & Visual Poetry*, Dell Publishing Co., 1971.

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JANECEK, GERALD, editor, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments 1900-1930*, Princeton University Press, 1984.

KOSTELANETZ, RICHARD, editor, *Text-Sound Texts*, William Morrow & Co., 1980.

KOSTELANETZ, RICHARD, editor, *Visual Literature Criticism: A New Collection*, West Coast Poetry Review, 1979.

MCCAFFERY, STEVE & NICHOL, BP, editors, *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, Under Which Editions, 1978.

SACKNER, MARVIN, editor, *The Beauty in Breathing*, Ruth & Marvin Sackner Archive, 1992.

SOLT, MARY ELLEN, editor, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Indiana University Press, 1968.

WILDMAN, EUGENE, editor, *Anthology of Concretism*, The Swallow Press, 1969.

WILLIAMS, EMMETT, editor, *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, Something Else Press, 1967.

A Short Selection of Visual Poetry Magazines

The following magazines have been either exclusively or partially devoted to presenting works of visual literature and/or poetry.

ALEA, Tom Hamill, 743 Oakland Ave. Apt 13, Oakland CA 94611
ART CRIMES, Stephen B. Smith, P.O. Box 14457, Cleveland OH 44114
ASSEMBLING, Charles Doria, P.O. Box 1967, Brooklyn NY 11202
ATTICUS REVIEW, Harry Polkinhorn, Box 927428, San Diego CA 92192
CENTRAL PARK, Stephen-Paul Martin, Box 1446, New York NY 10023
COLIN'S MAGAZINE, (formerly POETS. PAINTERS. COMPOSERS.), Joseph Keppler, 10254 35th Ave. SW, Seattle WA 98146
DOC(K)S, Julien Blaine, Le Moulin de Ventabren, 13122 Ventabren, France
FISH WRAP, Jim Maloney, 2507 East Union, Seattle WA 98122
GENERATOR, John Byrum, 8139 Midland Rd., Mentor OH 44060
INTERSTATE, Loris Essary, P.O. Box 7068, University Station, Austin TX 78713
IZEN, Annie I. & Stuart Pid, P.O. Box 1157, Athens OH 45701
KALDRON, Karl Kempton, 2740 Grell St., Oceano CA 93445
LIGHTWORKS, Charlton Burch, P.O. Box 1202, Birmingham MI 48102-1202
LOST & FOUND TIMES, John M. Bennett, Luna Bisonte Prods, 137 Leland Ave., Columbus, OH 43214
MALL LIFE, Mike Miskowski, P.O. Box 17686, Phoenix AZ 85011
MALTHUS, Dale Jensen, 2317B Carleton St., Berkeley CA 94709
NIL, Markus Binner, Hospeltstrabe 67, 5000 Koln, 30 Germany
O.ARS, Don Wellman, 21 Rockland Road, Weare NH 03281
OFFERTA SPECIALE, Carla Bertola & Alberto Vitacchio, Corso De Nicola 20, 10128 Torino, Italy
POSTEXTUAL, Cesar Espinosa, APDO Postal 45-615, 06020 Mexico D.F.
RAMPIKE, 95 Rivercrest Rd., Toronto, Ontario M6S M7H, Canada
RED LINES, Trudy Mercer, 602 15th Ave. #E, Seattle WA 98112
RETROFUTURISM, Lloyd Dunn, P.O. Box 227, Iowa City IA 52244
SCORE, Crag Hill, 125B Bay View Dr., Mill Valley CA 94941
SHISHI, Shoji Yoshizawa, 166 Suginami-ku kenjikita, 3-31-5, Tokyo, Japan
SKYVIEWS, Phoebe Bosche & Jim Maloney, 2507 East Union, Seattle WA 98122
TAPROOT, Luigi-Bob Drake, Burning Press, P.O. Box 585, Lakewood OH 44107
TERAZ MOWIE, Hartmut Andryczuk, 1000 Berlin 41, Postlagernd
TEXTURE, Susan Smith Nash, 3760 Cedar Ridge Dr., Norman OK 73072
UNI / VERSE, Guillermo Deisler, Kirchnerstrasse 11, 4020 Halle / Saale, Germany
VAST PUBLICATIONS, Raimondo Cortese, 174 Montague St., South Melbourne, Victoria 3205, Australia
WRITER'S FORUM, Bob Cobbing, 89A Petherton Rd., London, England N5 2QT
XEXOXIAL ENDARCHY, Miekal And & Liz Was, Rt. 1, P.O. Box 131, Lafarge WI 54639

FERNANDO AGUIAR

1. A poesia visual distingue-se da poesia literária porque, para além de conter, tal como esta, um conteúdo, a poesia visual tem também uma forma. Assim o processo comunicativo dá-se quer através do conteúdo, como através da forma desse conteúdo, o que multiplica a capacidade de comunicação e de informação do poema.

2. A maior parte dos elementos gráficos que utilizo na minha poesia são palavras ou letras que cortadas, partidas, distorcidas, aumentadas, reduzidas, assim como uma variedade enorme de diversos tipos de letra, contribuem para a composição integral do poema. Por outro lado, todos os elementos gráficos dum poema têm, obviamente, uma leitura própria. E tudo isso, letras, palavras e imagens, contribuem para a concretização e compreensão global do poema.

3. (Ver poemasem anexo)

4. Apesar de também já ter escrito e publicado poesia literária, actualmente toda a poesia que produzo é visual, embora me expresse através de vários suportes: impressão em livro, colagens para exposição, instalações, videos e performance.

5. Eu admiro bastante e sinto uma relação com obras poéticas de inúmeros poetas visuais que produzem trabalhos pautados pela qualidade e pela criatividade. Para só citar alguns (e muitos outros há que poderiam aqui ser referidos): Jiri Kolár, Guillermo Deisler, Bartolomé Ferrando, Joan Brossa, Julien Blaine, Enzo Minarelli, Eugenio Miccini, César Espinosa, Alberto Pimenta, Ana Hatherly, César Figueiredo, Jochen Gerz, Klaus Peter Dencker, Timm Ulrichs, Harry Polkinhorn, e Dick Higgins.

6. Tenho participado em várias dezenas de exposições colectivas e em revistas de poesia visual, assim como em bastantes Festivais de Poesia e de Performance, um pouco por todo o mundo.

   Em Portugal, para além de conhecer e de trabalhar (ou ter trabalhado) com todos os poetas visuais tenho, desde 1985, organizado inúmeras exposições, selecções de poesia visual portuguesa publicada em revistas portuguesas e estrangeiras, a representação portuguesa nas I e III Bienais Internacionais de Poesia Visual e Experimental no México, antologias de poesia visual e Festivais de Poesia e de Performance, nos quais já participaram várias dezenas de poetas visuais portugueses e estrangeiros.

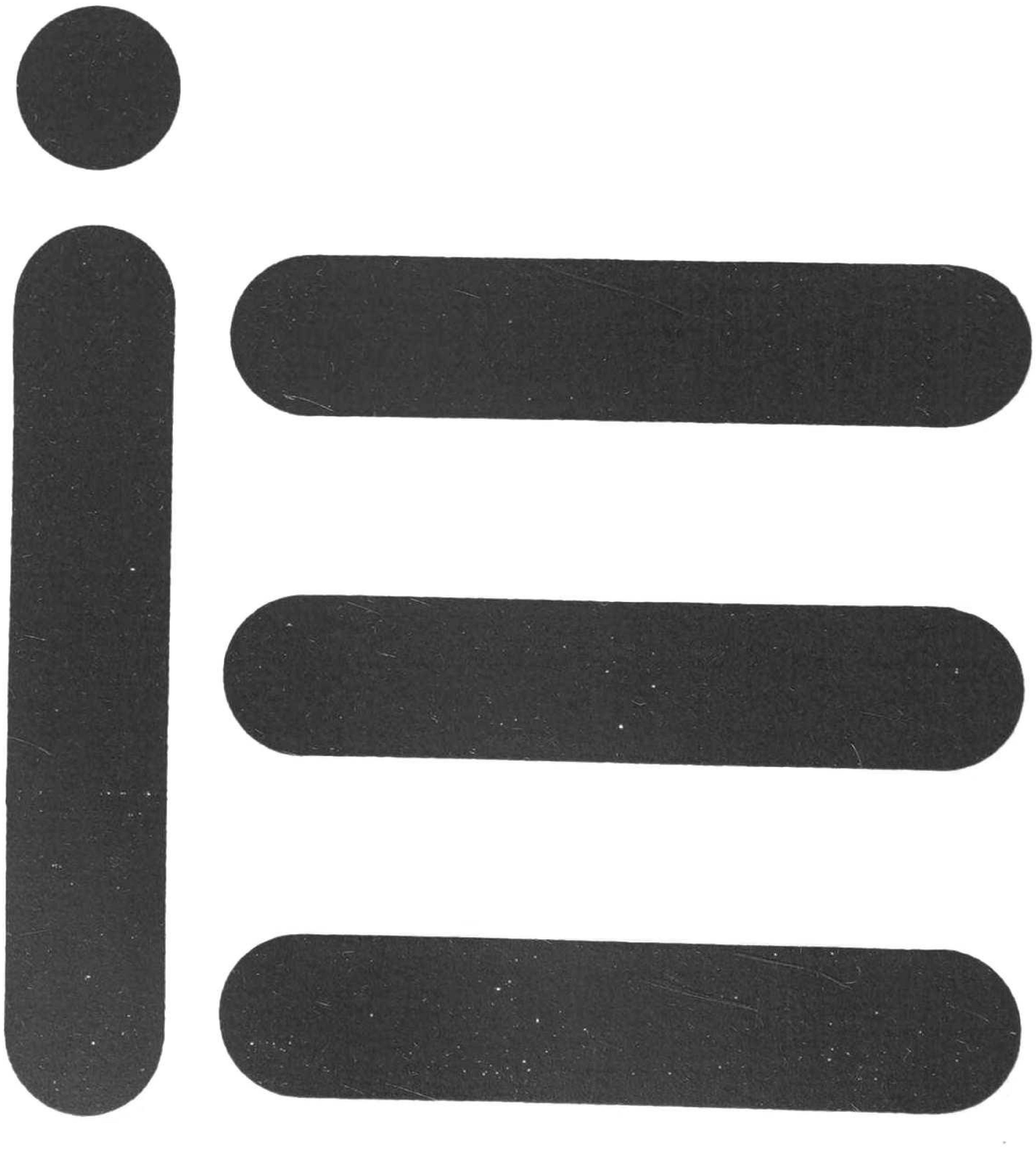
7. A minha audiência são todos aqueles que estão interessados no meu trabalho. Mas depende um pouco do contexto: se participo num Festival de Performance ou Poesia, são outros artistas e poetas, bem coma o público, normalmente jovens. Se o meu trabalho é publicado em livro ou em revistas, a minha audiência são os leitores desses livros ou revistas, etc. Basicamente penso que a maior parte das pessoas que se interessam por poesia visual são, para além de outros artistas, jovens e estudantes universitários.

8. Revistas literárias e de arte (já participei em cerca de 150), Galerias, Museus e Festivais (já participei em cerca de 130 manifestações colectivas internacionais) e livros (publiquei e participei em cerca de 20 livros, publicados em diversos países).

10. Todo o meu trabalho criativo, de produção, divulgação e organização é em função da poesia visual. O benefício que ela me traz é apenas de carácter intelectual.

11. Em termos monetários, a poesia visual não me dá quase nada. Gasto muito mais dinheiro com ela do que aquele que ela, de vez em quando, me dá. Os apoios que tenho tido a nível oficial resumem-se ás passagens de avião para participar em Festivais no estrangiero, e apoios diversos para as exposições e Festivais que organizo.

12. Acho que a poesia deve beneficiar de apoios oficiais e privados para que os poetas possam ter melhores condições para criarem e desenvolverem o seu trabalho. Isso não quer dizer, obviamente, que haja qualquer intromissão ou qualquer tipo de cedências por parte dos poetas em relação aos organismos públicos ou privados que concedem esses subsídios.



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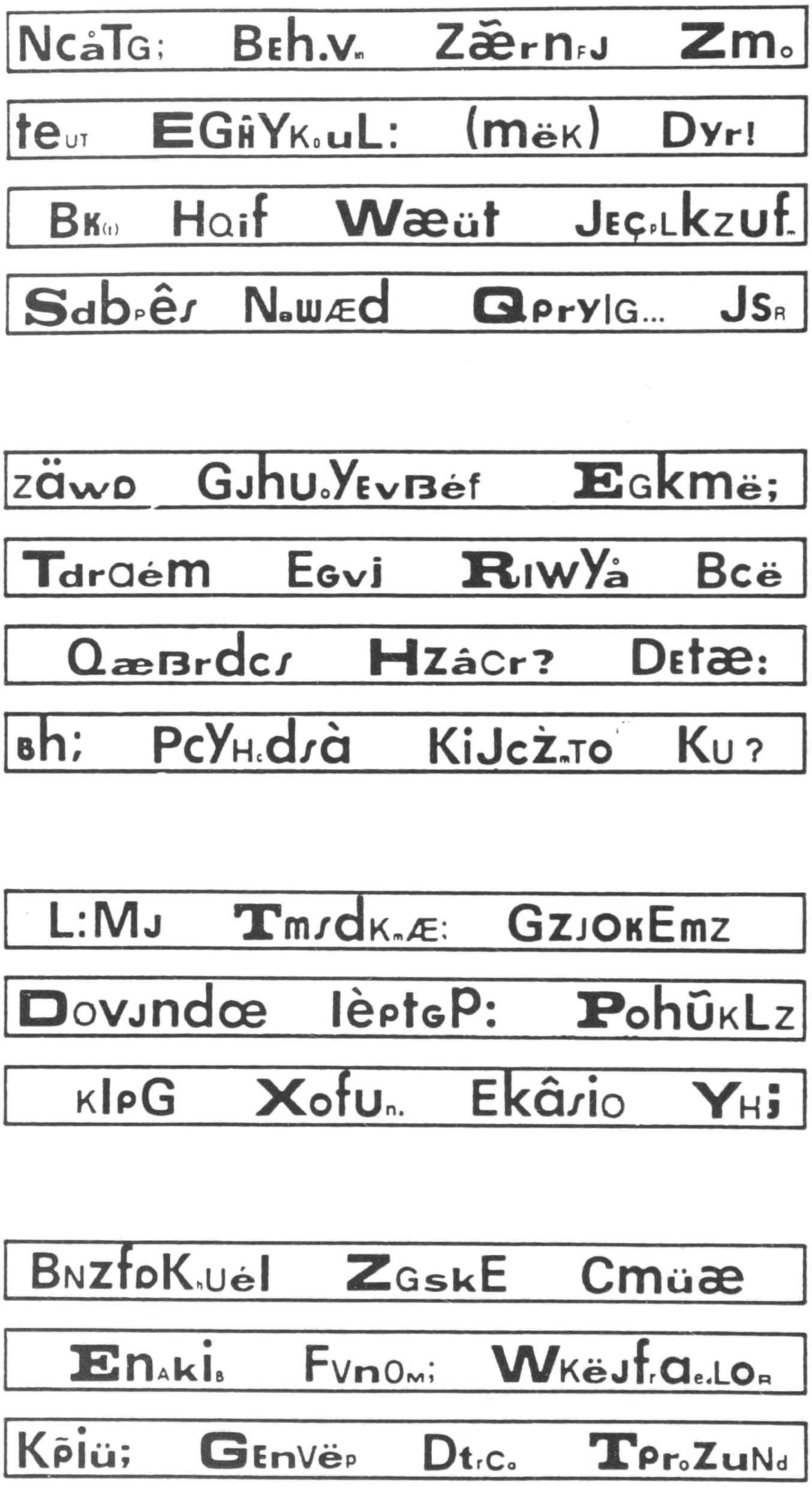
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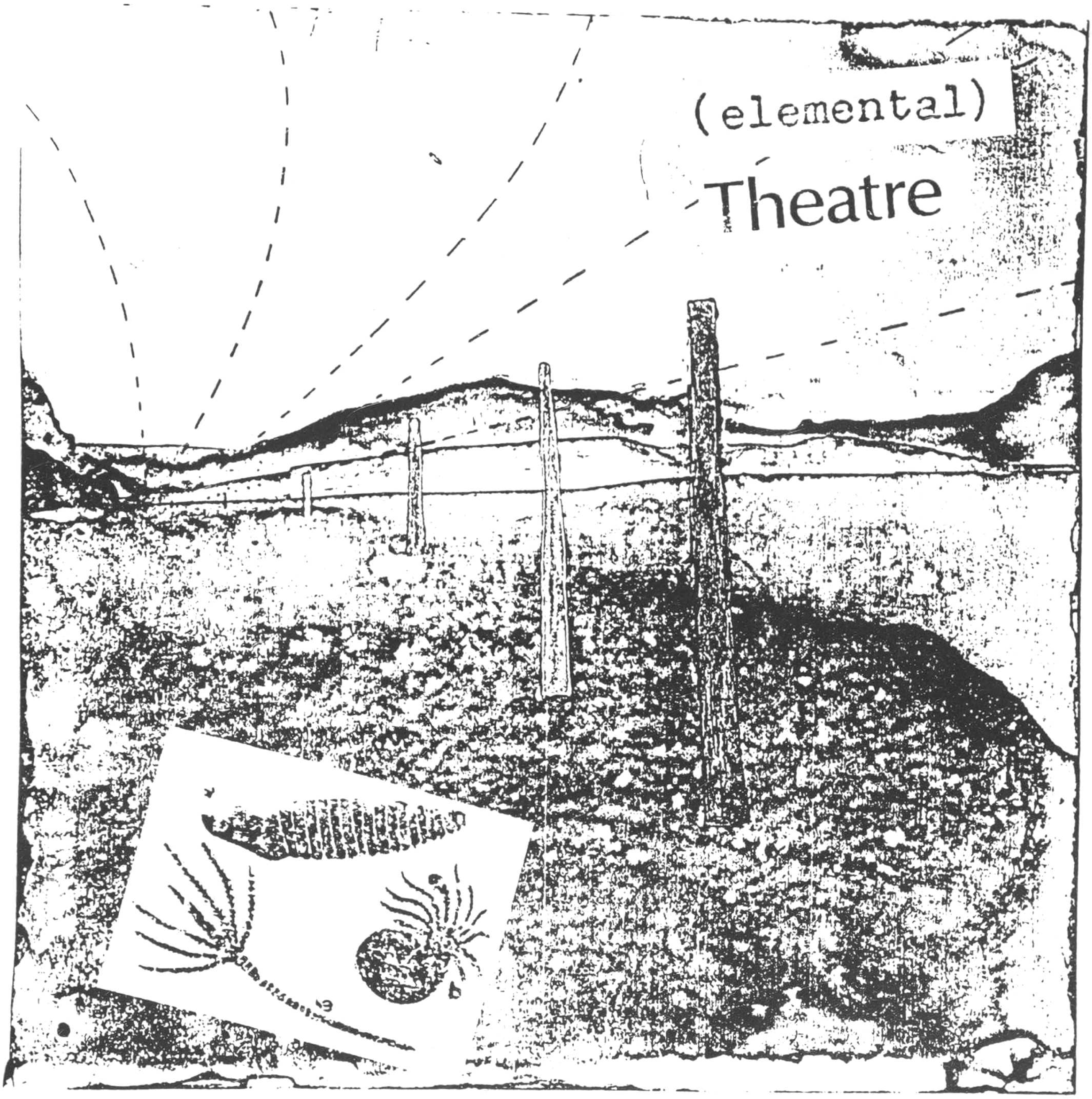
«SONETO VISUAL», 1989

CARL BAKER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DENNIS BARONE

I'll begin with question number four because it seems to me the place to begin: "Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'"? I consider none of my work visual poetry. (So you see why I choose to begin with four and not with one.) I do, however, believe that most, if not all, of my work has a visual component, and I have been interested in visual poetry since my introduction to poetry as a teenager. I remember that in my first semester in college we studied Emmett Williams' anthology, and I can also recall creating some visual poems. For example, I did one that simply listed in a straight line down the center of the page all the bridge numbers on the Garden State Parkway: Bridge No. 1, Bridge No. 2, and so on. I suppose the point might have been a play on concrete monumentality or else something like the monotony of monumentality. Bridges are monuments and certainly this long monolithic list of bridge numbers expressed both monumentality and monotony. But I love the Garden State Parkway. As Venturi said of the Las Vegas Strip: "We term it sprawl, because it is a new pattern we have not yet understood." And so maybe it was about pattern and order and, in Bateson's terms, "the patterns that connect."

More recently, the last page of the poem Peter Ganick and I co-authored (see GENERATOR 4, 1990) is in my mind a visual poem. Yet, overall I would say that sound more than image, visual or otherwise, has been and remains most important to my work. Nonetheless, this emphasis shares with visual poets a concern for the materiality of language. And so when in question number nine you ask about "contemporary socioeconomic and/or political situations" I think that this is one of the relevancies of new work – visual and other – to the current situation. To use a phrase from [Bruce] Andrews and [Charles] Bernstein: "repossessing the sign."

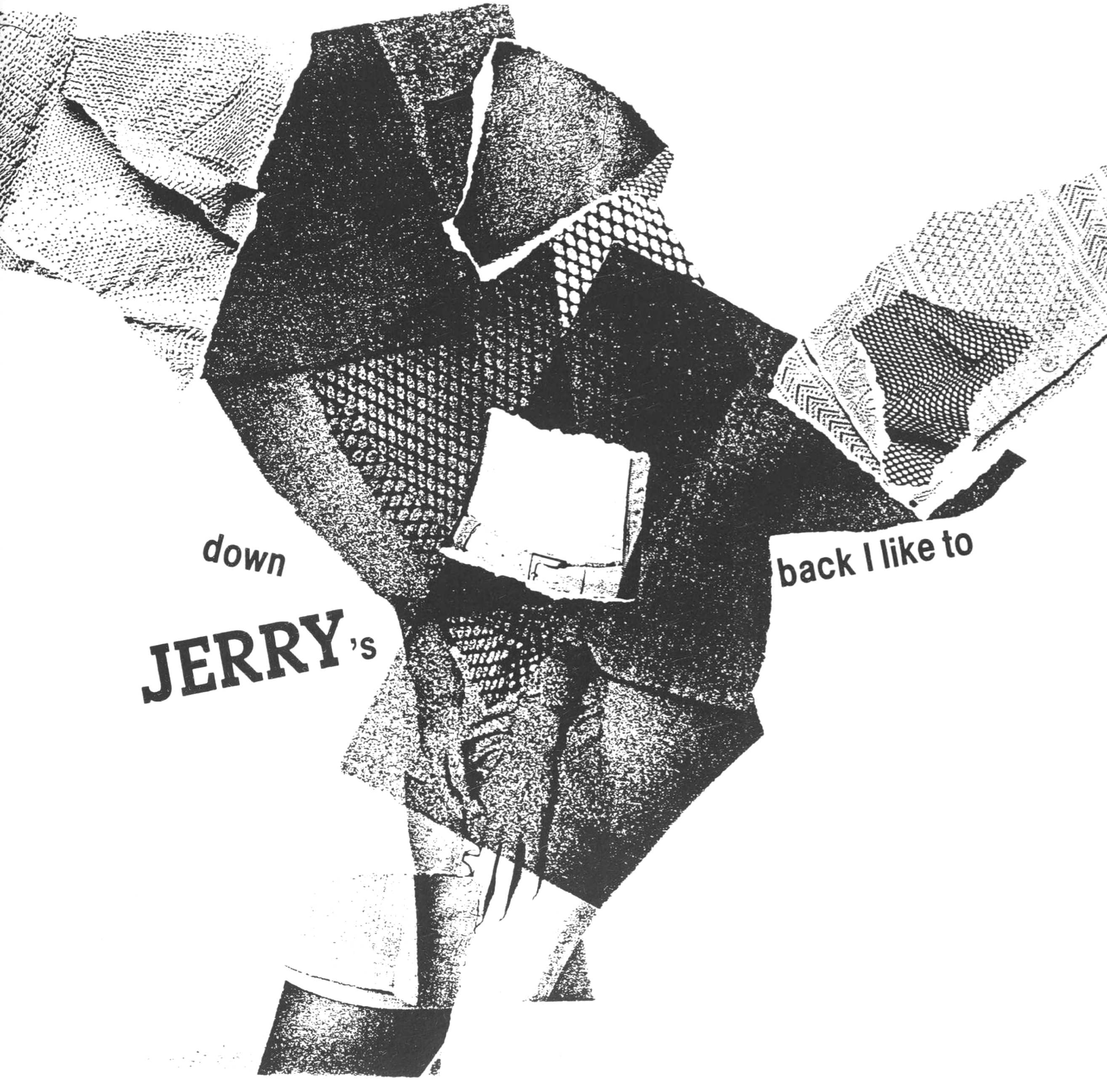
However, I am also interested in process as well as the word (letter) as object and so here I think of Black Mountain poets or Susan Howe. Here I think too of history and the visual once more. For example, in Susan Howe's work one can note the tablet-like form of many of the words, words in lines on the page. But then, the not so gentle surprise as words radiate on the page in many or all directions. In my work *Waves of Ice, Waves of Rumor*, a series of adaptations of French poems, there are perhaps five or six ways in which the poems appear on the page. And so the unity of the pages is not solid, but somewhat more fluid than solid. Shape is not rigid and in this way there is a very clear visual element to the work. You could flip through the work (Zasterle Press, 1992) and see many different forms rather than all the poems reduced to one strictly imposed rationalized form. And if you slowed down to read the poems, you would note the same thing in the hearing of them as in the seeing of them. (why is it that we say "do you see what I mean" when we speak?) This, too, relates to the historical aspect of the work. It calls into question the relationship between originality, tradition, authorship, and derivation. I think it asks if all history is a narrative to perpetuate some present.

I think that in some ways the above also answers question number three: "in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?" Though, I would narrow the words used and in that way make the question more general: that is, "in contemporary poetry." Make no mistake, I see some things as shared, shared between the primarily visual and the primarily aural.

Some additional comments, response. You ask what percentage of my income is derived from poetry? If I include teaching and define poetry in a broad manner, then all of it. But if I narrow it to just poetic work published or vocally presented to an audience, then I'd say around two percent. I do think that visual poetry should be subsidized by government and private grants. May all the contemporary visual poets included herein get all the support – financial and other – that they need. I look forward to the rematerialization of language in which the communities of the word are letters of process prior, contemporary, and next and not Baudrillard's timeless present of a freedom comprised of a car, a suntan, and a soft drink.

January 8, 1992

VITTORE BARONI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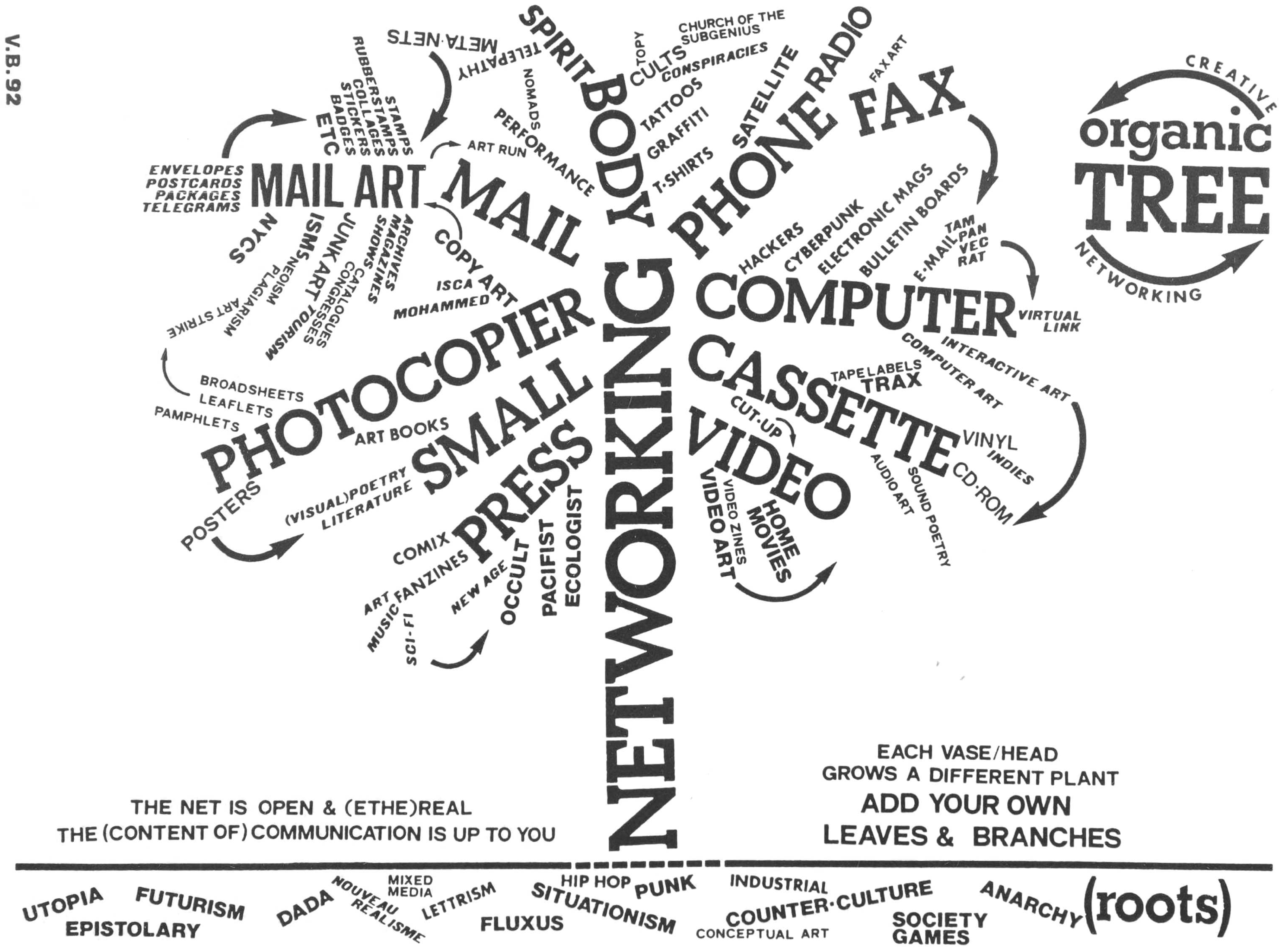
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GROWS A DIFFERENT PLANT
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EPISTOLARY
FUTURISM
DADA
NOUVEAU REALISME
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FLUXUS
HIP HOP
SITUATIONISM
PUNK
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CONCEPTUAL ART
SOCIETY GAMES
ANARCHY
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V.B.92

MICHAEL BASINSKI

COMMENTS: WHAT'S THE SCORE?

When I "read" a visual poem, regardless of form, my first concern is the poem's performabilty, which is to sing: does the visuality or graphic word manipulation lend itself to aural interpretation. Visual aspects are visual aids to aurality. A function of visuality is performance. If it isn't functioning perhaps the visual poem is not a poem at all but of another alien genre: visual art. A visual poem should be interpreted as a literary score and therefore produce or provide an aural image. All visual poetry might in fact have an unidentified and underdeveloped performance component. Visual poets should consider their pieces to be literary scores rather than purely literary visual images. Auditory poetry should expand its own limits to involve more visuality. Gingerly, I have started to explore visuality in my own pieces by manipulating the size of letters in a word or word glyph(see below). These grant performance cues(larger letters are performed larger). I have started to overload words: mooooon. This I consider a form of visuality. Vox veX haVin heaVin OX fyxe vizarD teaXT VO cawl. My visual experiments are attempts to subvert the cultural baggage words carry, hopefully, therefore, creating on the aural level: A Spell. A Prayer. A Rune. An Homage Chant Invokation. A Sing.

F R u

r u e

T i n

F L A

M m E

GUY R. BEINING

Why Visual Poetry?

We boil this pot of language into a soup so mixed that it is made into a mechanism for a larger target; sitting on lips of a city of words that should be muted in order to enact order, only to crawl thru chains, lines; links molded into a network that doesn't work, for the tone is of rubble raked again & again. Our present field strata blocks the horizon; we must therefore dig into the ground and unearth roots, expose hidden factors of the cause, this being a better barometer in which to knife the pg. In skimming this periphery one sees this poetic field that is constantly being picked before bud or fuse can ignite. And so, in the creative process one asks how can one drum a text down and so dissolve language and liquidate deliberate structure of bedding with words, one line after another, row after row, knowing that the soil has been eroded; therefore the product weakened? The pool, or better yet the spring of creation is broad; approaches are many. How does one swim within this reservoir? The slick, commercial world has already dipped heavily into this pool, mucking it up and even tilting winds that move those planted rows. Mass media's abuse of language and visual manipulation has trapped a goodly portion of the populace inside the skull of a TV, and has turned the page into neat labels, with endless packages to sell the public. Even war has become a commodity to sell. So, why not balance muck with mire, and mock the mass media with visual terror. As an artist, one is obliged to chisel away at this hideous glob of commercialism; break it up into immaterial matter, taking shapes, images and letters, and slapping them together into a new visual space that uproots the status quo, be it letter or label. The point is to turn the visual weapons of the media into parody; to break the knot around the neck of society that has its thought process strangled. It is time to burn the field and create a visual silence. Silence within the circle where there is meditation and a balance between audio and visual matter. Silence also in watching what is left, that being stones, i.e. architecture of rock as body parts. Let us say that each stone is a word; when you turn the stone in any way from its original point you begin the process from literary to visual work. With me there is a need to go off the beaten path when I feel boxed in by the restrictions of the pure poetic form. At this point in my creative work I probably spend more time within the visual fold, realizing that the multisensory make-up contained in the poetic body moves beyond form, at times it is an arbitrary scheme, almost a chance process. Visual visitations that jar against that stone as letter can strike it and turn it into powder. There is no level, no line, no language, just substance to be named as one sees fit to name it.

JOHN M. BENNETT

1. I don't think there is an absolute distinction: even the most traditional poetic texts have a visual dimension: the contrast between text and the blank space at the ends of lines. The only absolute distinction perhaps is between poetry as read/seen on the page and poetry heard/listened to in aural presentation.

2. Visual and cognitive experiences access and stimulate different parts of the brain. This is not, however, a contradiction or problem, but an enrichment of the esthetic experience. Adding a strong visual dimension to a poem adds a new layer to it. The experience of language itself, of course, is multi-layered in this sense: reading, writing, speaking, and thinking all use somewhat different parts of the mind/brain. So adding a visual layer is not a procedure without precedent.

3. cf. Number 2 above. The literary and visual overlap in visual poetry, and function simultaneously. A fifth dimensionality is created, one might say.

4. To some extent, all my poetry functions visually as well as literarily. Obviously, some of my work emphasizes the visual dimension to a much greater extent. And a vast body of my work "looks like" traditional poetry.

5. The kind of work I find most interesting is that in which there remains a literary element; that is, in which the language element retains words, phrases, and/or structures that can be read and that signify. Eccentric handwriting can be quite interesting. Least interesting to me is the visual poetry that uses letters or language elements as arbitrary marks to create graphic design; that is, where what the language elements signify is of little importance.

6. There are a number of visual poets I communicate with regularly; among them, S. Gustav Hägglund, Vittore Baroni, John Byrum, Robin Crozier, Mike Miskowski, jwcurry, Joel Lipman, Malok, Jake Berry, Chris Winkler, Daniel F. Bradley – plus many others I communicate with less frequently, or who send things to LOST AND FOUND TIMES, the magazine I edit. I've probably forgotten some people here . . . Sorry!

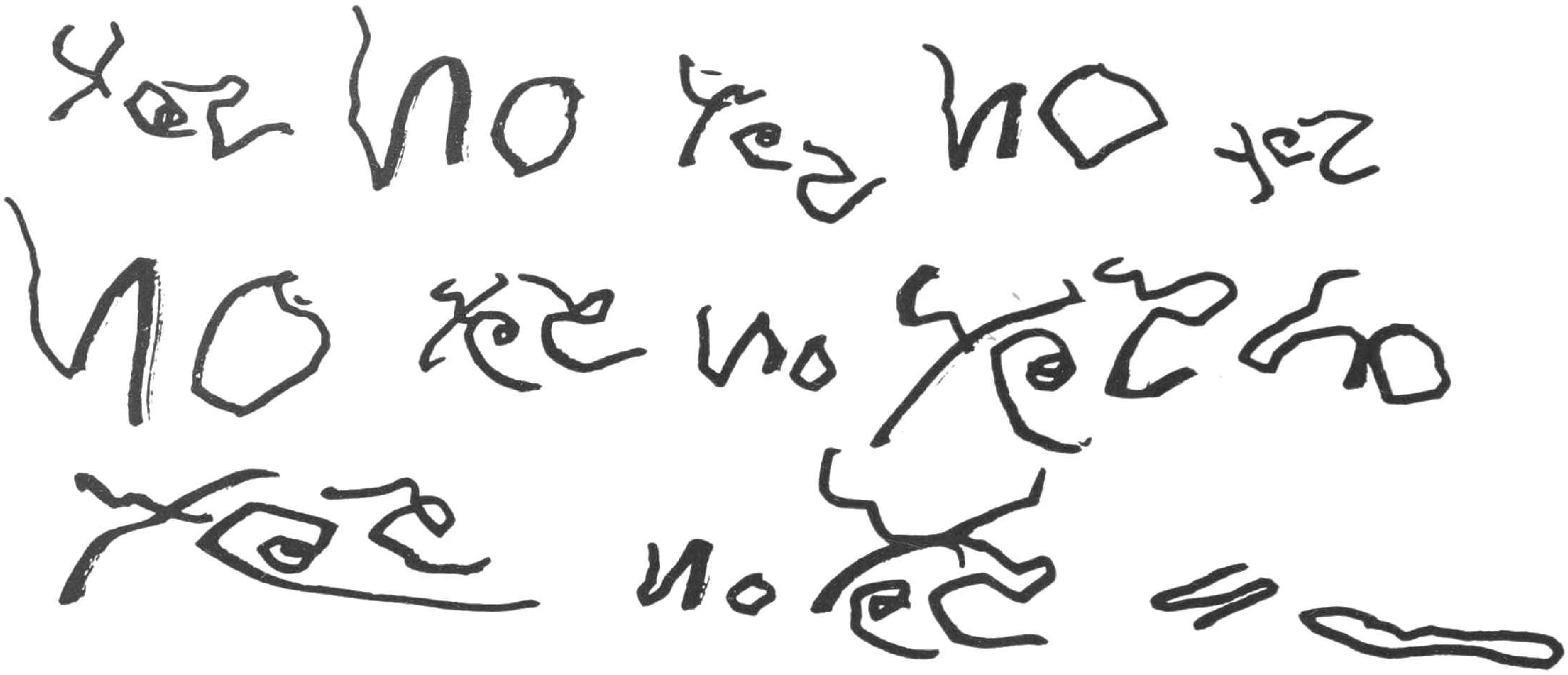
7. The above, plus readers of LOST AND FOUND TIMES and other magazines, plus the people, usually from the art community, who come to the exhibitions and shows I have in art spaces.

8. Well, the three you mention (literary magazines, experimental publications, gallery shows) plus my books, and the mail art network.

9.-10. Writing, by its very nature and in its very origins, is inherently visual, and since the beginning of writing, there have been forms of the art that put greater emphasis on its visual aspect. Thus visual poetry is nothing new and is a "natural" form of human expression/creation. It has, as well, its own traditions and history, with one modern line beginning in this century. Like all forms of human culture, it is intimately related to history and society in the broadest senses; tracing the dynamics of that relationship is far too complex a procedure to attempt in a questionnaire, and in any case would be submerged in ambiguities. Hopefully, as with all art, the readers/viewers of visual poetry would have their awareness of possibility expanded by the work, and their sense of connectedness with what is. This should stimulate their sense of responsibility, their commitment to love, their humility, and so on . . .

11. I receive no income from visual poetry. I sell no art works, few books. I do have quite a few subscribers to LOST AND FOUND TIMES, which includes a lot of visual poetry, but the magazine operates at a loss, in spite of occasional grants from the Ohio Arts Council to help publish it.

12.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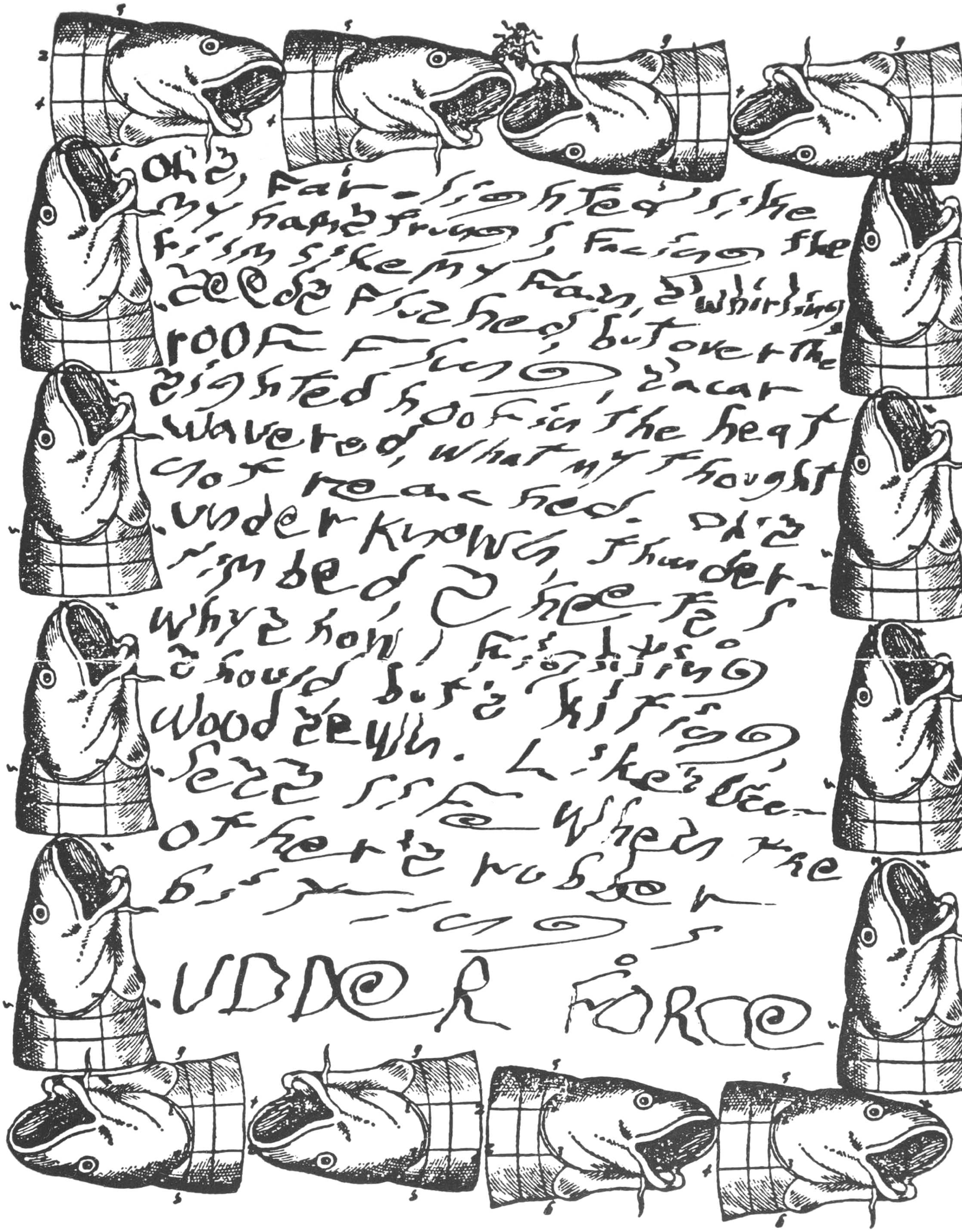

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b [illegible] rubber

UDDER FORCE

WILLIAM BENSON

1. Defining "visual poetry" is a thorny issue – for instance, according to the general approach taken by my teachers in college during the 1970s, an example of "visual poetry" would be W. C. Williams' short poem on the red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens. This is not what I would call "visual" (except in the sense of what occurs in the imagination of the reader), and while the example of Williams might be fine for the most conservative-minded, I do not believe that such a concept is being used by John Byrum, Crag Hill, or the other respondents to this questionnaire.

   I define "visual poetry" as having a spatial, graphic layout which is (usually) just as important as the words, phonemes, letters, or symbols contained within the work. (An exception might be some of Ed Ruscha's word paintings, where the layout is not always so obvious.) Visual poetry is an alternative use of text that usually contains a heightened use of plastic imagery as well as imagined imagery – this may be "organic" to the poem (such as a poem about Christmas with the text shaped like a Christmas tree), or more abstract and purely a graphic design without any immediate symbolic interpretation by the reader. Often a visual poem may thus have a residual "tactile quality" as a result of employing graphic layout of the text (whatever the "text" may be). Also, in comparison with a more conventional poem, a visual poem, when read aloud, often loses a great deal of its original impact (one poet that I believe has recognized this and attempted to resolve this problem is Jackson Mac Low) – to restate this duality, a poem written by Charles Olson's "breath" to determine the length of a line, is oral poetry, and it has little visual interest on the page; while the work of Mac Low (in some examples) combines visual presentation on the page with specialized requirements for performance.

   One important aspect of "visual poetry" is that it usually is thought of as being typography on paper. Of course, it may be three-dimensional (sculpture), or employ other media such as still or motion picture photography, or video. Unfortunately, while there are many visual poems (such as by the Italian Futurists) that have words strewn about like constellations, the poem exists as a static and unchanging object (although certainly there is eye movement, akin to Gertrude Stein's theory of landscape). One thing that should be explored more is having the text in motion (and by this I do not mean simply having a conventionally written text to be read left to right on a dot-matrix moving ribbon), but rather to provide alternative ways of reading and perception. For instance, some silent film titles would be animated (such as "Boo!" made to look wavy, or "I'm cold" to be shaking and mimetically 'shivering') – obviously these are crude examples, but which hold possibilities for exploration. Also, reading left to right (in conventional writing) does not always exist in visual poetry (such as in the constellation), however there are many other ways to organize and to have a text read (horizontal, vertical, circular, spiral, up or down, etc.), which I am unaware of being explored.

2. In my own work, the visual and graphic elements are different. My work is performance poems which are for several different performers – always a spoken part, a music part, and then a visual part – either a dancer or mime, and/or actual objects manipulated, and/or images on posters or shown by slides – and so, in performance, there are always actual visual images incorporated into the work. The "graphic" element is in the notation of the poem, which is made in space (the line) equal to time (a given number of seconds). I now make the notation very clear and straightforward to read, because in the mid-1980s when I had been experimenting with variant methods of organizing and reading the text, the few editors and friends that I showed such works to were completely baffled and confused. I took this to be a weakness in my work, and so to make it more accessible, my work on the

page is now "less visual" and more completely worked out as a final result, as a score. The "visual" interest, however, remains organic in terms of the spatial layout of the notation, and the actual visual elements (rather than having "spoken images") during a performance. One of the "gaps" to bridge is keeping a "visual poem" really visual during performance. My solution, however simple, stems from the fact that I'm too often bored by hearing poets read their work. This conventional writing and performance of poetry can easily be mechanically reproduced on an audio recording; however, by including at least one part that is purely visual within a poem, the only proper way to mechanically reproduce one of my works would be either sound film or video. As for this to be "'read' as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers," I use language in a context that robs it of any "literary" signification, by being much more literal and less symbolic than is usually expected in verse. For instance, in a conventional poem, one will write that the "ice cracked" and then one saw a "red beach ball" – what I do, instead, is not to use language to refer to such events, but to have a percussionist crack ice, and for another performer to either show a poster with a picture of a red beach ball on it, or to have the performer actually handle a real red beach ball. This is a way of letting the spectator/listener make his/her own metaphors within the context of the work, rather than the poet making such a purposeful symbolic construct through language.

3. The intersection of the literary and the visual in "visual poetry" is not only what interests me, for in my work it is as much the intersection between the literary, the visual, and the musical elements which makes a piece. All of my pieces are made as musical compositions (which result in a performance piece), and a musical composition does not have to have any "meaning" (however, I always have a point, a theme, a "meaning", an "objective", even though this may not always be obvious). I do not believe in any hierarchy of genres (i.e. that painting is more important than music, or music is more important than poetry, or that poetry is the ultimate art form), which unfortunately is foisted upon students, and continues today. The intersection of various media (language, visuals, music/sound) in a piece is simply what I experience in life. The problem is that conventional poetry is ONLY experience replicated through spoken language – however this is too much of a limitation. True, this is how one makes metaphor, but rather than the writer making metaphor through only words, I choose to include other elements (music/sound, visuals, human movement) that are treated as equal in importance to words or vocal sounds. It is not a going back to "the source" or to a poetry "in formation", but simply a replication of the way I experience, feel, and think. One of the great qualities of "visual poetry" is that it is a poetry that goes beyond words, and instead of going through words alone, other types of experience are included – i.e., there really is no way to accurately present a C-major triad in words – one simply plays (and listens to) a C-major triad. Visual poetry, in part, makes clear the limitations of linguistic experience of the world, and incorporates non-linguistic experience as well within the work. (I have not as yet included odors or tactile experiences in my work because of the problems involved in a public setting for prospective performance – the nose can not as rapidly distinguish different smells as can the eye or ear distinguish different events; and tactile events require an element of "audience participation" that I have not yet figured out how to incorporate effectively.)

4. Yes, I consider all of my poetry at present, and from the past eight years, to be "visual poetry".

5. The people and specific works that I feel a "kinship" with are many. It is difficult to mention them without seeming pompous, but I enjoy the work of Stephane Mallarme, Marcel Duchamp, George Herriman, Joseph Cornell, Gertrude Stein, John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, George Brecht, Keith Haring, and Brad Parker. Mallarme for all his work, but with visual poetry of course *A Toss of the Dice*; Duchamp for his dislocation of the image with meaning and expectation; Herriman for his "Krazy Kat" comic strip, which played

with text, visual image, and layout in ways that continue to amaze and inspire; Cornell for his gentle juxtapositions of the mysterious and the mundane (and his beautiful film scripts such as "Monsieur Phot"); Stein for her theory of landscape, the renewed function of how to write and how to read, and works such as *Tender Buttons* and all her plays; Cage in particular with his works *Water Music* (1952), *Music Walk* (1958), *Water Walk* (1959), and *Cartridge Music* (1960); Mac Low for much of his work that frees the poem from the page through performance; Brecht for all of his work, perhaps most importantly to me his insightful essay on chance from an aesthetic and scientific perspective, and his *Water-Yam* cards; Haring for his public images that placed plastic imagery on the borderline approaching linguistic expression; and Parker for his fine graphic sense and insight into male-male sexuality. "Krazy Kat" is my hero; and Brecht is my favorite artist (a complete artist). Also, I am very much influenced by the "social drama model" and "liminality" theories of the late anthropologist Victor Turner, whose ideas I have used as a take-off position for the past 10 years.

6., 7. & 8. I am isolated (strange to say, being in New York City – suffice to say that I am shy); I have no audience; and the primary forums for my work at present are publications. I have not had a performance since 1984, and do not have any interest in performing in any of my works – it seems to be too egotistical to be a performer – and also, I see no point in writing a work if I were to be a performer. (Again, this goes back to my earlier comment that I'm bored with most poetry readings by other poets. A work is more interesting if done by other performers; and also, I do not like the idea of a poem being a "monologue".)

9.a. The relevance of visual poetry to prior (historic) poetic practice is great, but is not generally acknowledged. (I am referring to Dick Higgins' book on pre-avant-garde visual poetry published in the latter 1980s.) And, of course, what was once "avant-garde" 50 or 75 or 100 years ago is really no longer such, yet I still find much of this work, many of these artists, and most of their ideas to be unknown or strange to many people (but perhaps I am too concerned with "conservative" educators – still, for instance, I have met many teachers of German culture, and almost none of them have ever heard of Schoenberg, Webern, or Schwitters!). But what was once "avant-garde" still seems to be so to many, even "educated" people. Contemporary artists must not cater to this insufficiency by renewing ideas from the past 100 years. I personally feel that visual poetry is now at a classical stage, where there is still a great deal of room for experimentation, but also that there is a great deal of room for systematic exploration of previous ideas that have not yet found full expression. I do not advocate a reactionary avant-garde based on history – this seems to me to be the basis of much so-called "post-modernism" (particularly in theory and analysis).

9.b. Contemporary poetic practice is a thorny issue, apt to unintentionally make "enemies" where that is not intended, nor where there should be any such situation. There are many more important issues right now than art, whatever form one is thinking of. I do not believe in any "post-modern"-ism – THIS, right now, is the modern world. I do not believe that poetry should be anything – except that it be in some way relevant to experience NOW. For instance, there are still people in the U.S. who regularly use horses (i.e. the Amish), and so the sound of hoof-beats is not simply an archaic memory of a now directly-unknown past; and Jackson Mac Low has used words like "thee" in his work, without making a sophomoric imitation of Elizabethan verse. We are in a state of a multitude of different but simultaneous notions of what truly is "contemporary" – and to be literal, any work of art that is made from reference to life as actually lived (rather than from precedents in art) will always be contemporary (although not always evidently so to everybody else). The idea of an "avant-garde" does not personally interest me, for this is a rather egotistic notion, which involves an elite, an "us" and "them", the idea that the "artist" is ultimately "better" than everyone else ("excepting, of course, other artists that one likes").

The relevance of visual poetry to contemporary practice (I can only speak about my own work here) is that it is autobiographical without having a direct one-to-one relationship to my exterior, "factual" existence. Visual poetry involves in part a depersonalization through de-emphasizing linguistic/conventionally metaphorical constructions, and instead incorporates nonlinguistic elements from experience back into the poem as well. In this sense, every "contemporary" poem can not be said to be "fiction", even though one (either the reader and/or the writer) may not actually "prove" the "truth/fact" of it.

9.c. The relevance of visual poetry to contemporary socioeconomic and/or political situations? In being "contemporary", any art is responsive in some way to these concerns (i.e. environment), and is always made from what is happening at the "now-moment", but also somehow *transcends*.

The environmental situation means several things. For instance, if one writes a book of poems, where it is 100 pages long, half of the pages are blank, and of the other pages there is one word on 16 pages, two words on 11 pages, three words on 8 pages, four words on 6 pages, five words on five pages, and six words on four pages – such might be a "beautiful poem" but it is also a decorative waste of paper, of spatial layout. How many trees need be sacrificed? And, in looking at art in terms of its ritualistic roots, must one thus continue to make art in terms of such? One thing that visual poetry can do today is to break from ritualism, from symbolism (be it murder, or any of the conflicts of "drama"), as well as to stop being "static" (the myth so eloquently expressed by Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, a construct which Beckett himself broke out of in his later works) by being *concerned*. Unfortunately, I am expressing an emotional response, but it is from emotions that I make a poem-composition (as well as any of my academic essays (of which this is NOT an example)).

10. The value of visual poetry to our current situation, and what it brings to those who view/read it, (in my own work) is to use emotions to get people to think, to get people to recognize emotions are real, and thus (like language) as impediments, and ultimately to realize that emotions and linguistic experience are – yes, "nonfiction" – but also not really true, they are just inner constructs, part biological, and part imaginary (and how much of our imagination is really just chemical?). Poetry need not be "relevant", for this involves raising questions – and poetry sometimes does (and often should), but poetry need not raise any questions, involve any "conflict" or "argument", in order to still be "relevant". I find the poetic experience (whether reading, say Walt Whitman; or experiencing something for myself, and either choosing to write or not write based on that experience) to be multifaceted and simultaneously disparate. The writer may (or may not) choose to make a work "relevant" to the contemporary world, but ultimately it is the reader who determines whether or not a work is "relevant" (by saying this, I do not mean that the text changes from reader to reader as is sometimes stated in deconstructionist theory) – except for a few pieces by John Cage or Jackson Mac Low, most pieces do not change – it is only in the interpretations of the text by the reader in which a work "changes"). Visual poetry is one genre which makes this situation all the more crucial and obvious.

11. Zero percent of my income is derived (either directly or indirectly) through my poetry, or academic writing, nor have I ever received any government or private grants.

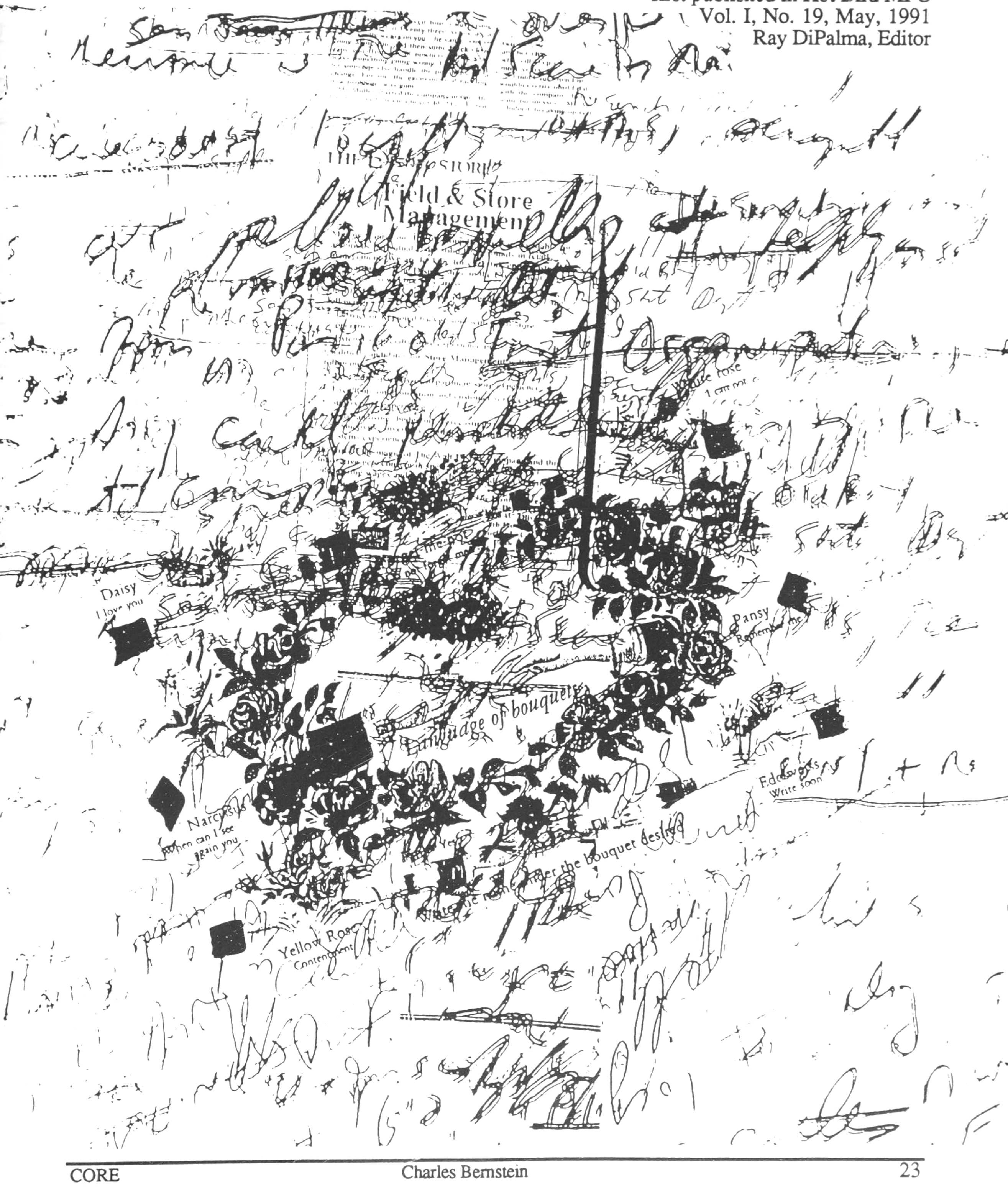
12. Do I think that visual poetry should be subsidized by government and/or private grants? I feel very ambivalent about this question. Ideally, the public at large would be interested enough in art to make this question obsolete. In the current economic and environmental situation, I feel that government should subsidize public work projects – specifically, instead of building roads, to plant trees, and actively promote public transportation, and a less wasteful lifestyle. Art should, I think, be subsidized by private grants.

There is a great debate right now about grant applications to the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] being rejected – for instance, most recently a grant rejected from the Franklin Furnace – because of supposedly "sexually explicit" material. This has gotten a lot of people rather fussed and angry – but it is silly when someone like Madonna can make millions of dollars from her videos and concerts, and have her crotch-grabbing accepted for what it is, a middle-class, middle-brow tease (there is nothing controversial involved). Much of the debate that centers around these grant rejections is not really about censorship, but about the assumption that government SHOULD be actively involved in funding the arts. In 1980 I spent some time in England, and was once talking with a Dutch artist. He said that he did not like the idea of governmental art funding. At the time I was nonplussed, and asked why he felt that way. He said that the Dutch government heavily subsidized artists, with the result that it made many artists lazy (due to a guaranteed income) and also (however subconsciously) resulted in a great deal of conventional and mediocre work (I do not equate conventional as necessarily meaning mediocre).

The best way for the government to subsidize artists would be through a lottery – enter all the applicants for the year in a computer, then by chance procedures determine the recipients and the amount of money (this would avoid the current problem of judgmental values, although I doubt very much if most artists would participate in such a program). In any case, it seems that artists and intellectuals are taken much more seriously in Europe than in the U.S. – but government subsidies do not change this situation (as far as I can see) to any significant extent.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

excerpts from *Language of Boquets*
first published in Hot Bird MFG
Vol. I, No. 19, May, 1991
Ray DiPalma, Editor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Management
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Daisy
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When can I see
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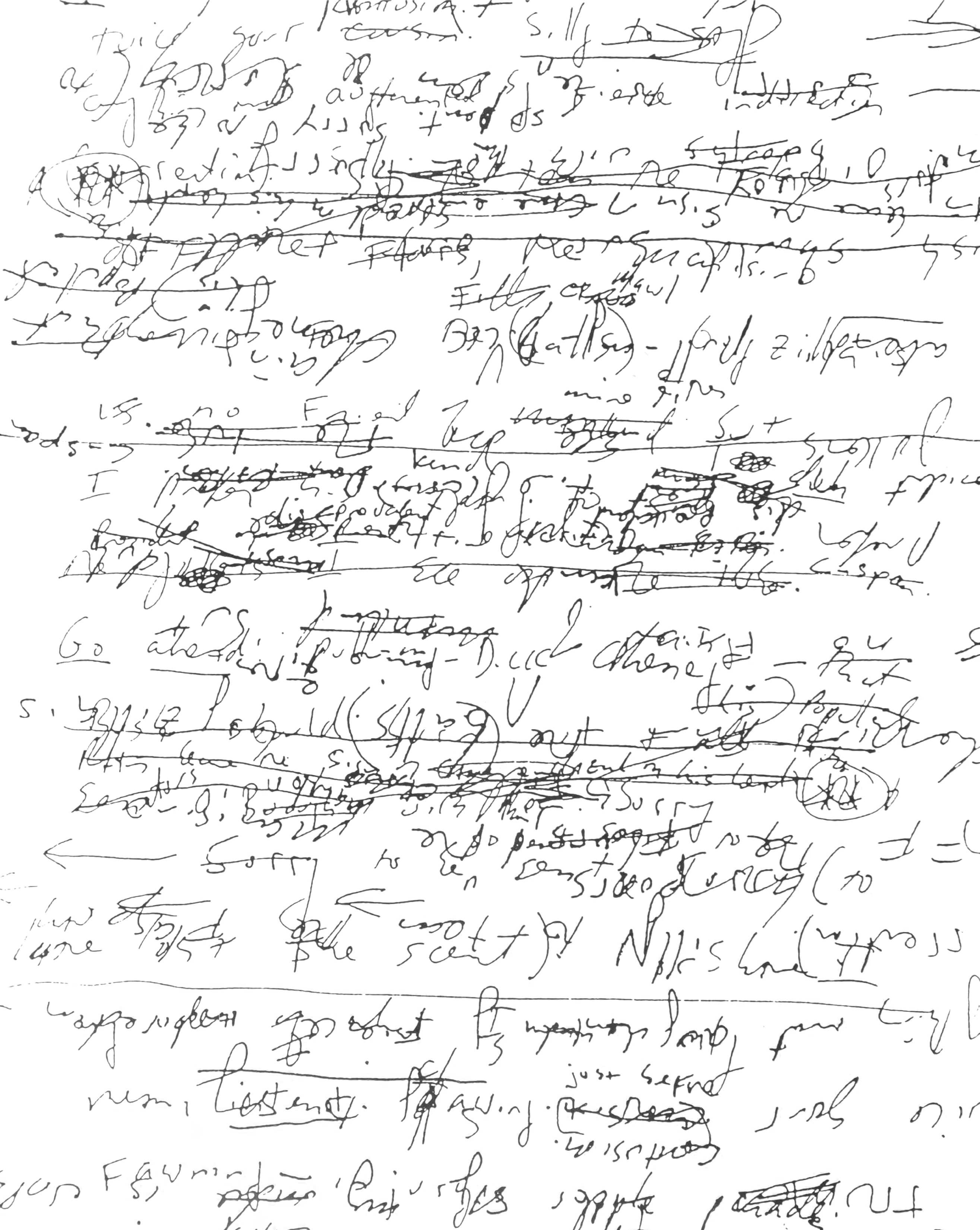

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JAKE BERRY

1. Visual poetry aims specifically toward eye, retinal, image without, beyond, or beside words. Other poetic forms do not necessarily take the visual into account.

2.

Anything can be read as poetic. Poetic is a group of sounds Signifying - a capacity for sympathetic understanding of individuated imagination(s).

The m literary and the visual are the same thing applied two different ways due to the neurosis of categorization. They constitute elements of consensus reality & are co-conspirators in its control. Should we remove the categories each naturally participates freely in the experience of the other.

4. Not specifically, but practically.

5. Since each is all - then all are related.

ό I gladly participate in a community that contains, but is not exclusive to, visual poets, or those that would call themselves such. They include many of those included in this survey I'm sure.

7. My audience is anyone/thing that witnesses my work in any way, either intentionally or by accident.

∞. All of the above plus individual packages in the mail.

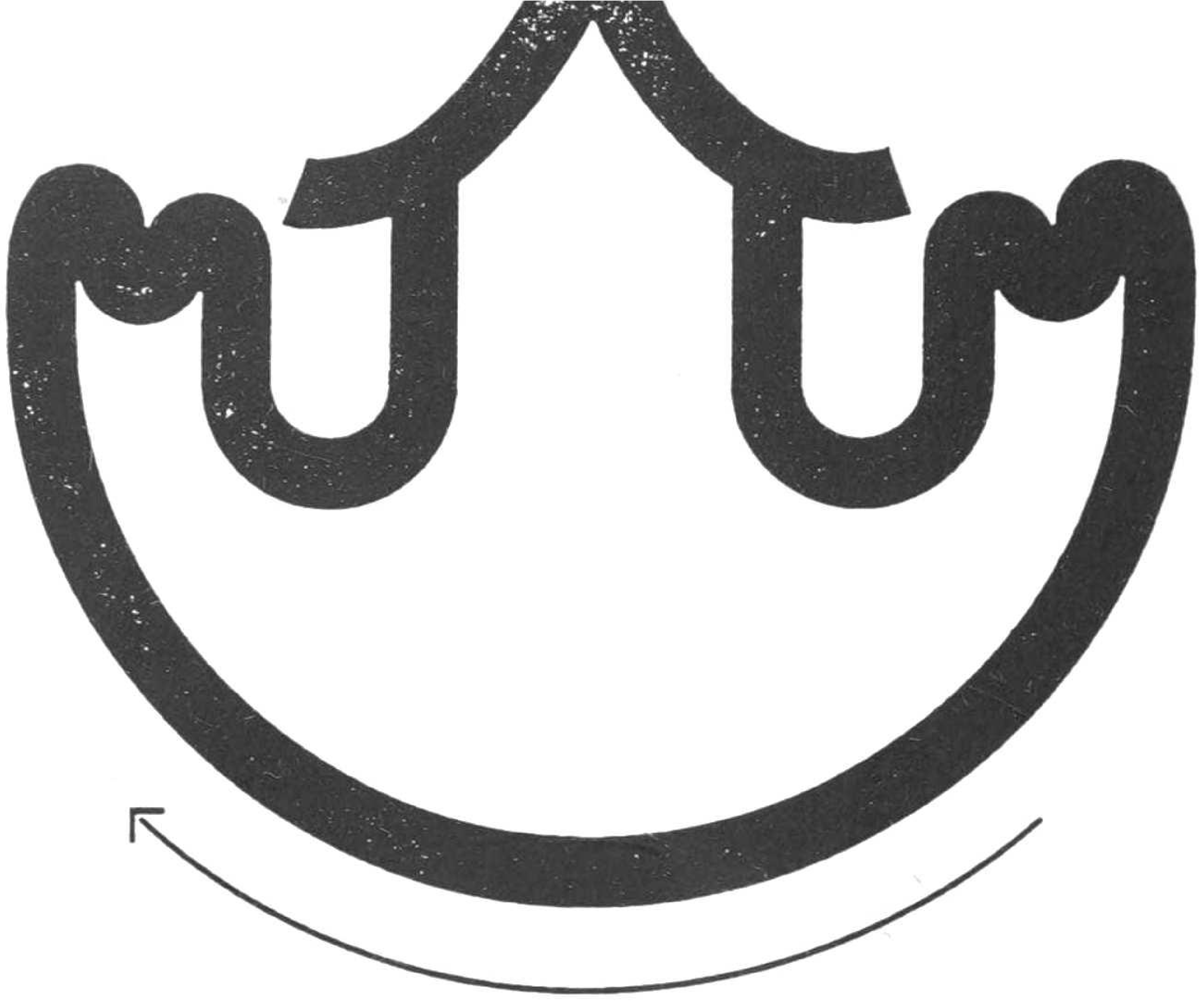
9. I don't have the slightest idea, except that those things I absorb through the 6 + senses tend to enter my work and that could be anything from any time & any perspective.

10. It should and does expand the field of experience of those who witness it.

11. a.) almost none b.) zero ☺

12. It is unfair to subsidize some art and not subsidize all art. So if the government has chosen to subsidize art then visual poetry, along with everything else, should be included.

FRIEDRICH W. BLOCK



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cognitive auto-poiesis
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of

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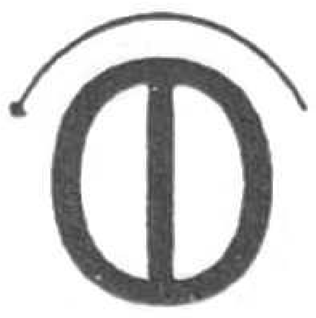


JONATHAN BRANNEN

1. In a sense, all written poetry is visual poetry, just as all books are tactile experiences. What distinguishes visual poetry, as such, is that it exploits the mode of presentation by incorporating it into the work (to the point that they are one and the same) rather than using it merely as a means to an end. Because its graphic aspects engage the eye sensually as well as the intellect, utterability is not the primary, or even a necessary, technique through which a piece connects with the reader/viewer. Visual poetry relies upon what the German visual poet Franz Mon has dubbed "spatial articulation". A book is essentially isolated words, much like the brain marinating in formaldehyde that Igor mistakenly steals. Visual poetry isolates language in a very different way, it CAT scans linguistic manifestations.

2. Visual poetry exhibits an awareness of the surface of language and exploits this surface as a syntactical dimension. It explores the breach between what language constructs are intended to communicate (represent) and what the mechanics of language actually depict. All elements of a language, even those as mundane as punctuation, are cultural artifacts. By actually "looking" at (examining) language, visual literature evokes/invokes this. Simultaneously, it questions the manner in which the appearance and applications of linguistic elements interact with and influence perception. The fact of language is very different from the act of language.

3. I approach visual writing from various angles, ranging from computer collages, such as my Mona Lisa series, to typoglyphic sequences such as *nothing doing never again* and *Warp & Peace*. In these typoglyphic sequences, often each panel is built from multiples of one letter and "meaning" evolves as the panels segue one into another. I view this as akin to scrutinizing subatomic particles. I'm hoping to photograph the nativity of meaning. I'm intrigued by this because I often suspect that "meaning" may well be some form of mass hypnosis.

   Language is an act of faith. When I use the word "chair" in daily conversation, I must embrace the belief that the individual with whom I'm speaking has enough commonality of experience to understand what I'm referring to. Yet, no two people have had the same experiences with chairs or the same history of awareness of the term. Ludwig Wittgenstein says (in *Zettle*, I think) something to the effect of:

   > You see a picture of a chair. You're then told that it represents a construction the size of a house, now you see it differently. You don't see change of aspect, you see change of interpretation.

   Experiencing visual poetry is like realizing that the chair in the picture may be the size of a house. It's an investigation into the nature of semantic reality. Language structures our perceptions. Semantic reality is the house we all live in, even if the furniture is uncomfortable at times.

4. I consider some of my work to be primarily visual literature, although I often incorporate some degree of "visual language" and graphic elements in works that are essentially textual in nature.

5. The visual poets whose work I feel the most affinity with are Stephen-Paul Martin (*The Flood* and *Corona 2500*), Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, and Dom Sylvester Houedard. I enjoy the work of many others, but these are ones I currently feel the most kinship with. There's a lot of exciting work being done now.

6. No.

7. Who knows?

8. I consider literary magazines and small presses devoted to presenting experimental works (often in experimental formats) to be my primary forum. Although my work appears in gallery shows, I think of this as incidental exposure. Still, those contemporary gallery goers who are interested in current art as art, rather than as investments or as accessories to their decor, tend to be more open to alternative media than most readers. Because of this, exhibitions provide access to an audience that I wouldn't otherwise connect with.

9.

10.

11. If I subtract the postage, I'm running a deficit.

12. I have an innate mistrust of governments, but basically I think visual poetry should be subsidized by everyone.

LARY BREMNER

01/4/92
Eme

Considering that my own work is not particularly "visual" in emphasis, I imagine your questions are addressed to the small Tsunami chapbook output. Four could be considered to have a strong visual/graphic component: the inaugural *Metaflowers* by Arni Runar Haraldsson; *Affordable Tedium* by Nancy Shaw; *rIMAGE* by John Byrum; *Cat Licked the Garlic* by Anne Tardos. Both Haraldsson and Shaw are primarily known as visual artists, but curiously, their books used graphic elements as a mere adjunct (text + image, standard format, albeit *interactive*) to their "writing". Byrum's piece foregrounds typography, using ((non)inter)locking grids, opaque tectonics, semantic shifting-plates. Only Tardos actually integrates the *pictorial* with the textual – the super-saturation of laser image obliterating portions of repeated (insistent) text and necessitating new readings – while flickering (zoom-in *zaum*) typographically and leaping (as *"cantatrice"*) between four tongues. Glossy, yes, but not so grapholallic as, say, the long-ago anthologized poets of a perceived avant-garde involved with "concrete poetry". So, the same questions get asked again with "visual" poetry? Get (in practice, in evidence and example) answered? Most of the practitioners of that era dealt with typography or visual aide-memoire score for performance (lettrism?). bp nichol re-alphabetized the dissolving frontier where reading was not semantic but gestural (erase everything but, say, the intonation pattern) neither sub-morphemic nor purely graphic or typographical buildup that toppled or tentacled with allegorical (polysemic, rather) motion. Some were moving away from letter-base to graphic gesture: Diter Rot (minimalism into graph) Verdi & Mary Ellen Solt into music or Seichi Niikuni's purism, binary-flicker. Its been 25 years since that Emmett Williams anthology, (now as notable for its inclusion of Vaclav Havel(!) as for the absence of carny-canuck Steve McCaffery,) and advertising glam, digital technology, artvideo MTV to DTP "democratization" and the general consumptive overload of the "visual" have all made the early work of people like Hansjorg Mayer, Jackson Mac Low, and Claus Bremer look like an atom-split exploited. So it comes around again, and we look at HOW we make what we mean by an economy of the smallest relations, graphic squeeks, looped, amplified, linked.

04/18/92
Imp

Bruce Andrews' *Fractals* and *StandPoint* visual as field constellation but glyphs such cues for dancemotion as could score. The tips of molecular mint proofs viewed through wrong-end of the telescope, Apollo Graham Diving Bell, cave in Plat, snap of preposed tattoo-by-committee, twg to grd n vsble i (because you felt chill about to say just then) raised crosshatched facial muscles and hand out the highway window an equi-valence of sky with something father called funnies turned up by tread. Auction panting in sidecar mirror. Porthole rebus, my botony, your scarf, *des cullottes de Collette* flee the market. Scout bicycle pig portal passing giraffe. Carpet sprawl. Little Johnny Everything. Muzzle P in notion. Drawing a breath, a bath, in lieu of guns. Eye-cons. Cinemap. Glyphs in mead. Oxbow on chemo. Feathered nape as soon as creek. Caress, *fleur d'un oubli*. And throw Pa a morph. Rune detuned, for a'that. Ant tic crated. FAULT as laughing matter. Long division. Seamy, filmy, tai-chi thither. Blank stares. Straw math. *No naka no soto*. Yonder squall for mittle. Guerrilla peace. Enclave, en core. Mind over weather.

BRUCE CAMPBELL

Between the Cracks, or . . .

There is a visual impact in much poetry. Some poetry (like pattern poems) draws our attention to this element. Other poetry does not. Is the layout of the poem on the page important? We've been trained to ignore the graphic (material) elements. When Susan Howe speaks of the material elements of Emily Dickinson's manuscript, she draws attention to a language we can't (quite) read. What does it mean if Dickinson's dash is long – or short? Goes up – or down? Howe insists these differences matter, even when she herself isn't ready to say how they matter. But, given the idea of competence in literacy, is it any wonder, then, why we don't think to read them?

To use a concept from linguistics, the dashes do not constitute a meaningful difference. A meaningful difference is always relative to a specific group of speakers (however large or small). Thus, whether we pronounce the "s" in "absurd" as an "s" or a "z" makes no difference to the meaning of the word (though, of course, it may to how others treat us). (Conversely, the voiced "th" as opposed to the voiceless "th" often does constitute a meaningful difference (i.e., the old example: "then" vs. "thin").)

When meaning is not just idealized but normalized, the graphic element comes under the heading of accidentals, a judgment which affects Christopher Smart as well as William Blake, Bob Brown as well as Kenneth Patchen. (A continuing point in Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* is the loss of the illustrations as poems become anthologized or collected.)

Print has had a lot to do with this normalization. It narrows the range of what we think to write. Consequently, what can not be printed (sometimes, what cannot be printed easily) becomes a private discourse by default; for print is the public face. Economics plays a crucial role in this default. But it is by no means the only player. There is also the idea of an optimal situation for communication; that is, everyone will get a chance to speak but few will get to be heard.

Grounding this public role is the medium of the line; for it keeps access manageable. The transmission of print depends upon an idealization of communication: one to one, without distractions but with the time to stop, look up words in a dictionary, or recollect the points that have already been made.

Print is strictly linear. On those rare occasions when something circular (or crooked?) is printed, the action may represent the versatility of print (or the dedication of a printer/typesetter), but having shown it can be done is generally enough. Maturity is too bound up in a straight line, wavering suggesting childishness or indecisiveness. When Bob Brown's *1450-1950* first appeared in 1929, it was a prophecy: the strict linearity of the Gutenberg revolution would be overthrown by 1950. When Jonathon Williams' Jargon Press reissued the book in 1959, the effect was vastly different: the book had become historical without quite becoming current. And not even its whimsy could quite save it.

"Visual poetry" has come to designate so many different forms that, at least without further characterization(s), we are perhaps in danger of proving an old chestnut: "visual poetry" means so many things it can be said to mean nothing. If we think of works in our times with "visual" claims (say, Bern Porter's *A Book of Does*, Johanna Drucker's *The Word Made Flesh*, Charles Bernstein's *Veil*, Spencer Selby's *Stigma*, or Bruce Andrews' *StandPoint*), we might suspect that what most unites such works is that they are not what we are used to. While a negative definition like this may well be consonant with our first reaction, it will hardly do for long.

Where Bern Porter works in the field of the "found", using (for the most part) commercial (and commercialized) images with slogans in order to expose the banality or horror of each, Johanna Drucker relies upon the physical properties of type (i.e., size, font, placement, and spacing) to create an effect, on one level, not unlike time-lapse photography. Charles Bernstein's work consists of typed-over lines often so think that we can't see the language for the alphabet. For Spencer Selby, language and picture overlap; indeed, they interfere. Bruce Andrews' work is almost glyphic, as if it were on the verge of a language or as if it recognized no need for language at all. Were we to find an optimal way to read any one of these works, there is no reason to think that way would work as well – or perhaps at all – with any of the others. This is one "meaning" for "visual poetry". It approaches the condition of the "unreadable".

Yet such a "meaning" is problematic. We have only to consider Murray Krieger's recent work on natural signs, *Ekphrasis* (or recall John Heydon, from *The Cantos*: nature needing no verbal tradition). If there is an aspect of "visual poetry" which is nostalgic for a natural condition (i.e., prior to language), it is certainly not in Bernstein's *Veil*. On the other hand, in his book, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928*, Willard Bohn describes "visual poetry" as utilizing "a dual sign". This means that "visual poetry" is manifested through "two sets of signifiers and signifieds". What is clear, from Bohn's definition, is that "visual poetry" in this context refers to works that combine words with graphic elements. (Apollinaire and Marinetti are the best known of the writers he addresses.) This is a reasonable delimitation, but it does not exhaust the range of "visual poetry". Neither (as we have seen) does it delimit the range of the "visual" in poetry. And yet perhaps the very reasonableness, finally, does no service to "visual poetry".

The question of "visual poetry" is the question of meaning. How can the visual text mean? Or, what are the meaningful resources which are to be allowed the visual text? When Group μ, in *A General Rhetoric*, articulate the links of poetry and rhetoric, they necessarily come up against the limit of the visual poem. Why is poetry different from painting? That is, "why is there no abstract poetry (even if one wants to call it 'concrete')?" Because, they reason, "the poet works with words." So, if not representational, words are, nonetheless, referential. Indeed, we might say that, for Group μ, insofar as the visual takes precedence over the words, the result cannot be called poetry; insofar as language takes precedence over the visual, the result, while it may be "poetry", will not be "visual". (Recall, however, Julia Kristeva's observation that "literature" cannot exist for semiotics.) But this says much more about our concepts (i.e., of "poetry"), than about the products of visual poetry. In other words, we can say that there is "no abstract poetry" because we have already determined what poetry is. Thus, "visual poetry" is a limit case.

Because it is a limit, it can never be determined (completely), nor abolished. We can never do without it. Either we want it or we do not. In the first case, we desire it in order to shake up poetry "proper". In the second, we may wish to do away with it but, as a limit, we cannot do away with it without at the same time doing away with poetry "proper".

The challenge, we might say, is to keep open the concept of meaning. One way to do this is to play the visual off against the linguistic, giving priority to neither term; even if, in doing so, the "poem" approaches the condition of the plastic arts. (Bernstein's *Veil*, after all, not only could be, it was, exhibited.) "Visual poetry" risks the mechanism of meaning; it risks being meaningless (or taken as meaningless). "Visual poetry" is (in Umberto Eco's phrase) "undercoded"; that is, it is unclear how to read it because the codes (which control the reading) are weak. Whether this would ally it to a post-foundational thought, what Gianni Vattimo has called "weak thought", is, of course, another question. However, as a result of its undercoding, "visual poetry" privileges the production of the text over its consumption (communication). It reminds us that meaning is not a settled affair, that codes are arbitrary (or constructed, anyway), and that language excludes much of what goes on around us all the time. To this extent, the "visual" in "visual poetry" looks beyond the "poetry" to spy, between the cracks, the power of language.

SERGE CENA

1. Prima di tutto occorre stabilire ciò che si intende per "altre forme" poetiche che in sostanza si resolvono in due grandi Categorie: una, che diremo Poesia Lineare e l'altra Poesia fonetica. La poesia lineare è un'espressione sottoposta alle regole del verso cioè alla metrica; in questo sistema si può riconoscere la più gran parte del materiale poetico. Il termine poesia acquista però anche il significato di un parlare elevato, raffinato, contrapposto alla prosa come linguaggio della vita quotidiana. A questo schema non sfuggono le esperienze più recenti che partendo dal verso libero conducono a una sorta di prosa poetica, o a una poesia essenzialmente astratta.

   La poesia visuale, pur non ignorando la frase e la proposizione, determina il proprio linguaggio avvalendosi dell'universo di segni non alfabetici, non già, come vorrebbe qualcuno, come un "di più" percettivo, poiché se così fosse si tratterebbe di mera decorazione o nella migliore delle ipotesi di illustrazione, ma come elementi proprii del linguaggio e quindi con un preciso valore.

   Nella poesia visuale la forma, la grandezza, il colore dei caratteri alfabetici, la loro disposizione sul piano, il piano stesso con le qualitè sue proprie (ruvido, aspro, liscio, colorato, riflettente ecc.) sono partecipi alla comunicazione poetica con un valore paritario agli altri segni colti dall'universo iconico (disegno, pittura, scultura, fotografia ecc.) poiché intimamente inerenti alla struttura dell'opera. Così se tutta la poesia lineare ha come referente di base il linguaggio parlato e su esso articola le proprie strutture, la poesia visuale si articola su un piano più vasto che è referente al linguaggio parlato quanto possono esserlo i pittogrammi Algonchini, lasciando quindi ampio spazio di intervento alla vocazione creativa dello spettatore.

   Quanto alla poesia fonetica è da considerarsi in controcanto della poesia visuale (non a caso la maggioranza dei poeti visuali sono al contempo poeti fonetici) e così come questa metabolizza i linguaggi proprii di altre arti, la poesia fonetica associa intimamente alle proprie strutture il linguaggio musicale, ma anche quello della danza, della mimica, del teatro e della performance. Con l'avvento della poesia visuale e fonetica si è assiatico ad uno azzeramento della vicenda poetica e all'introduzione di una concezione affatto nuova, quindi non equiparabile alla poesia lineare.

2. La domanda risente di una ingenuità di fondo legata a un pregiudizio che prende le mosse dalla poesia tradizionale e dal linguaggio strettamente letterario. Per quanto mi riguarda, tutti gli elementi visuali che uso partecipano in egual misura alla costruzione di un linguaggio poetico, senza risentire in alcuna misura del distacco dal tradizionale linguaggio letterario. Ciò mi è stato reso possibile dal modo di accostarmi all'elemento visuale, di qualunque natura esso sia, che fa sì che io non lo intenda come un "di più" in appoggio all'elemeno verbale, né tantomeno come elemento decorativo. La parola, la frase, la proposizione per me sono oggetti che non godono di alcun privilegio, ma sono materiali di comunicazione come tutti gli oggetti del mondo sensibile senza incappare in contraddizioni o gaps.

3. La poesia visuale contemporanea è composta da un coacervo di tendenze, il che rende impossibile dare una risposta generalizzata. Ogni tendenza aderisce più o meno strettamente a qualche genere di comunicazione linguistica. Comunque credo che tutti i generi di comunicazione linguistica possono essere utilizzati come materiale. Quanto ai metodi che permettono una scelta e un uso di questi materiali questi cambiano secondo i presupposti di ogni tendenza, poiché ognuna di esse ha un carattere suo proprio che

determina interessi contrastanti con le altre tendenze (ad esempio tra poesia visiva e poesia concreta e tra queste e la nuova scrittura) per cui le intersezioni di letterario coinvolte da una tendenza restano totalmente aliene ad un'altra e vice-versa.

4. Tutto il mio lavoro (dal '67 al '70 e dal '75 a oggi) è interamente dedicato alla creazione di un linguaggio poetico visuale. A parte un intervallo dedicato all'arte programmata ('70 - '75) e naturalmente per quanto riguarda la produzione fonetica.

5. La direzione del mio lavoro dall' 86 a oggi si è rivolta verso una forma plastico-pittorica-poetica che, per quanto io sia a conoscenza, non ha alcuna affinitè nell'ambiente poetico visuale. Come spirito invece mi trovo molto vicino all'area Fluxus di cui condivido la visione dada del mondo dell'arte.

6. Da qualche anno tra Arrigo Lora-Totino, Sebastiano Ciliberto e me si è creato una sorta di sodalizio che nell'ottobre scorso ha dato luogo alla creazione di un gruppo a cui abbiamo dato il nome di BILDGETICHT, che in realtà non ha scopi comuni ed è quindi privo di un manifesto. Si tratta più che altro di un modo per presentare al pubblico tre tendenze distinte sia nei presupposti filosofici, sia nell'ambito della realizzazione, allo scopo di fare emergere la ricchezza di possibilità creative insite nella poesia visuale.

7. Oltre all'ambiente specializzato della poesia visuale, data la natura delle mie opere, sono conosciuto nell'ambiente artistico italiano, specie quello del nord Italia, anche se conto collezionisti in Francia e in U.S.A.

8. I luoghi più approppriati sono senz'altro le gallerie e i musei, per quanto anche le reviste rappresentano un buon mezzo di divulgazione per raggiungere un pubblico non specializzato. Specialmente i settimanali, più ancora delle riviste d'arte, mi sembrano un media ottimale.

9. Non credo che la poesia tradizionale o quella contemporanea possano avere una qualche influenza, se non marginale, sulla poesia visuale. Le condizioni socioeconomiche e politiche possono invece, in qualche misura, influenzare i poeti visuali. Personalmente il mio lavoro è in relazione all'antropologia sociologica. Attualmente la mia attenzione è diretta verso le relazioni dei segmi pagani e quelli cristiani, parallelamente ho anche interessi per l'incidenza del problema ecologico nel comportamento sociale dell'uomo.

10. La poesia visuale contemporanea è stata ed è il momento coagulante che sta portando a una nuova concezzione dell'arte. In futuro, non credo potranno ancora esistere scultura, pittura, musica, poesia ecc. come fenomeni racchiusi in sé stessi. La poesia visuale ha dato l'avvio a una compenetrazione tra le arti, e quando dico compenetrazione non intendo multimedialità, ma stretta relazione, metabolizzazione tra le varie arti catalizzate dal fare poetico visuale.

11. Al momento l'attività di poeta visuale e fonetico rappresenta la mia unica fonte di guadagno, il che mi consente di sopravvivere benché con qualche difficoltà. Quanto alla provenienza di questi proventi, essi derivano unicamente da fonti private e solo in percentuale trascurabile, e solo per quanto riguarda la poesia fonetica da istituzioni pubbliche.

12. La poesia visuale, come ogni arte, deve rivolgersi al pubblico e nel pubblico deve trovare le sue fonti di guadagno. Un aiuto governativo potrebbe certamente facilitare il campo della ricerca e delle esposizioni non commerciali, tuttavia non bisogna confondere esigenza di mercato e momento culturale.

DAVID COLE

1. Articulation of a 'field of perception' as distinct from a 'line of thought'; the spatial position of a word on the page in conjunction with the sense position in the literal unfolding of the meaning; the expression of the hand (art) gesture simultaneous with the expression of meaning.

   Visual poetry is the act of the eye in the setting forth and the appreciation of the meaning of language. Furthermore, visual poetry is the comprehension of individual words in the space of silence.

2. The graphic elements 'share the same formed space' as the language elements and thus lead the reader's eye on inter-trajectory paths, between meanings perceived as portions of language revealed and 'lines of delight' perceived in the direct appreciation of the non-verbal line or positioning or shading or imaging. Visual poetry is an interactive perceptual field in which linear and spatial perceptions are held in tension and released in form.

   Visual poetry is a perpetually bridging art act, since every blank or empty space is potentially verbal just as every filled or written space is potentially graphic. Thus, within the visual poem, language becomes gestural and graphic line and space become narrative.

3. In visual poetry the eye flickers over and captures/recaptures verbal meanings from within the possible arrangements. The eye-mind determines coherence at the same time that the eye-arteye perceives aesthetic array. Thus the viewer, like the poet creator, actively unfolds, discloses, essentially comprehends the visual poem as a whole through a series of perception strategies both intellectual and aesthetic.

   The point of this is to 'loosen up' both the seeing and the understanding of the viewer in a way similar to that process in the poet her/himself.

   Visual poetry attempts to unite or embed image and sense, not as embellishment or decoration or illustration, but as a seamless observation or declaration or idea.

4. All. From envelope as synecdoche to contents as lyric, philosophic, zenish discourse!

5. I feel most kinship, ultimately, with those visual poets who grapple with the meaning of gestural lines at the same time as they work with meaning; that is, those who consider the cursive exploration of space as a major enquiry. I have done extensive, complementary collaborations with marilyn rosenberg. I have been endlessly taught by the visual poetry of betty danon, ruth laxson, roger erickson, paul zelevansky, carol stetser, and kathy ernst. My interest and regard, however, extend across the entire contemporary endeavor: I have been doing collaborations with each and all of the above named poets for the last five years as a way of exploring how visual poems are created. In many cases my collaborators and I have simultaneously published the documentation of how the shared poems were developed as they were exchanged.

6. I participate in the 'eternal network of correspondence art'. That is, I use visual poetry directly as a way of making artworks which then communicate along and across cultures. I particularly like using visual poetry as part of the collage of the envelopes enclosing art. I consider the envelope to be synecdoche, while the letter or artwork inside is slip of the tongue.

7. Fellow visual poets. Postmen/postwomen.

8. The almost exclusive forum for my work is personal exchange of artworks with other corresponding artists; occasionally artists' bookworks exhibitions; rarely literary or experimental magazines. I prefer concrete, direct communication with a one-to-one audience as a way of exploring poetry as dialogue and shared perception.

I would like to see visual poetry exhibited as a 'walk-through state of mind': a library of language situations through which an audience leisurely ambles. I understand visual poetry as a sculptural form, in which the curves of space and the space of curves, objects, minds interact; the visceral presence of that phenomenon should be one of the goals of our future exhibition. Akin to secular cathedrals. Akin to acrobatic playgrounds of the mind. Akin to stopping traffic with alarming/charming messages.

Visual poetry surrounds the act of experiencing language as it occurs; it is the poetry of experiencing the recollection.

While most obviously about space, visual poetry's cultural force, I think, will arise when we can command a shared non-egotism of time – that is, when we can form, make, or share a poem together in a common space – wherein language is overlapping conversation, communication, and expression. I think that this is a form quite different from traditional poetic forms of literary or experimental magazines. Visual poetry is a body of shared perceptions.

9. Visual poetry continues the reflective (recollective) romantic poetic tradition insofar as it concerns the direct placement of the poet (and the poet's eye, mind, soul) in relation to the 'decipherment of landscape'. Visual poetry continues the typographic experimentation of the surrealistic and dada artists.

But visual poetry is now of an age itself! Around us advertising, propaganda, mass media, and disjunctive journalistic layout and design, on the one hand, and, on the other, ideas, images, and individual identity as equally quantifiable information, force the poetic spirit to grapple with a 'concretized objectification of meaning'. Concrete poetry was the momentary awareness that language had become reified, and therefore was incapable of spiritual release except by playing language back to the public as concrete object or as absurdly meaning(ful)less chatter. Visual poetry is the further extension of the opening within the field of language utterance and understanding. I think of visual poetry as a deconstructive poetic echo – a concentration upon individual utterance as a 'ma' (delay in time or gap in space) way of eliciting landscape (context) from the hearer/seer.

Visual poetry is both more primitive and more sophisticated than the poetic tradition which it carries onward. It is more primitive insofar as it feels constrained to reconstruct word by word the poetic language which it inherits in order to re-value it; more sophisticated precisely because it creates an echo in empty space – that is to say, it en-ables the poet/reader to hear the whole poem within the detail by simultaneously creating a parallel aesthetic sensitivity through placement or line or shape. Visual poetry is most interesting along the boundaries between language sense and abstract image, their intertwining. At the same time, many visual poets are clearly 'travelling through sign and symbol' toward a re-perception of primal and/or future source.

Like all artists, visual poets are within the socio-political struggle for influence in the shaping of their culture. As artists, we live in a 'dead culture' dominated by the expectation of success (wealth and notoriety) as a measure of importance or clarity. A dead culture is a culture of echoes within an echo-machine, the fart to wind-tunnel effect! A healthy poet is always local, always shamanistic, always finally compassionate. Hmm. We are, we note, the first rung of a long ladder; the point is to enjoy the climb and leave traces.

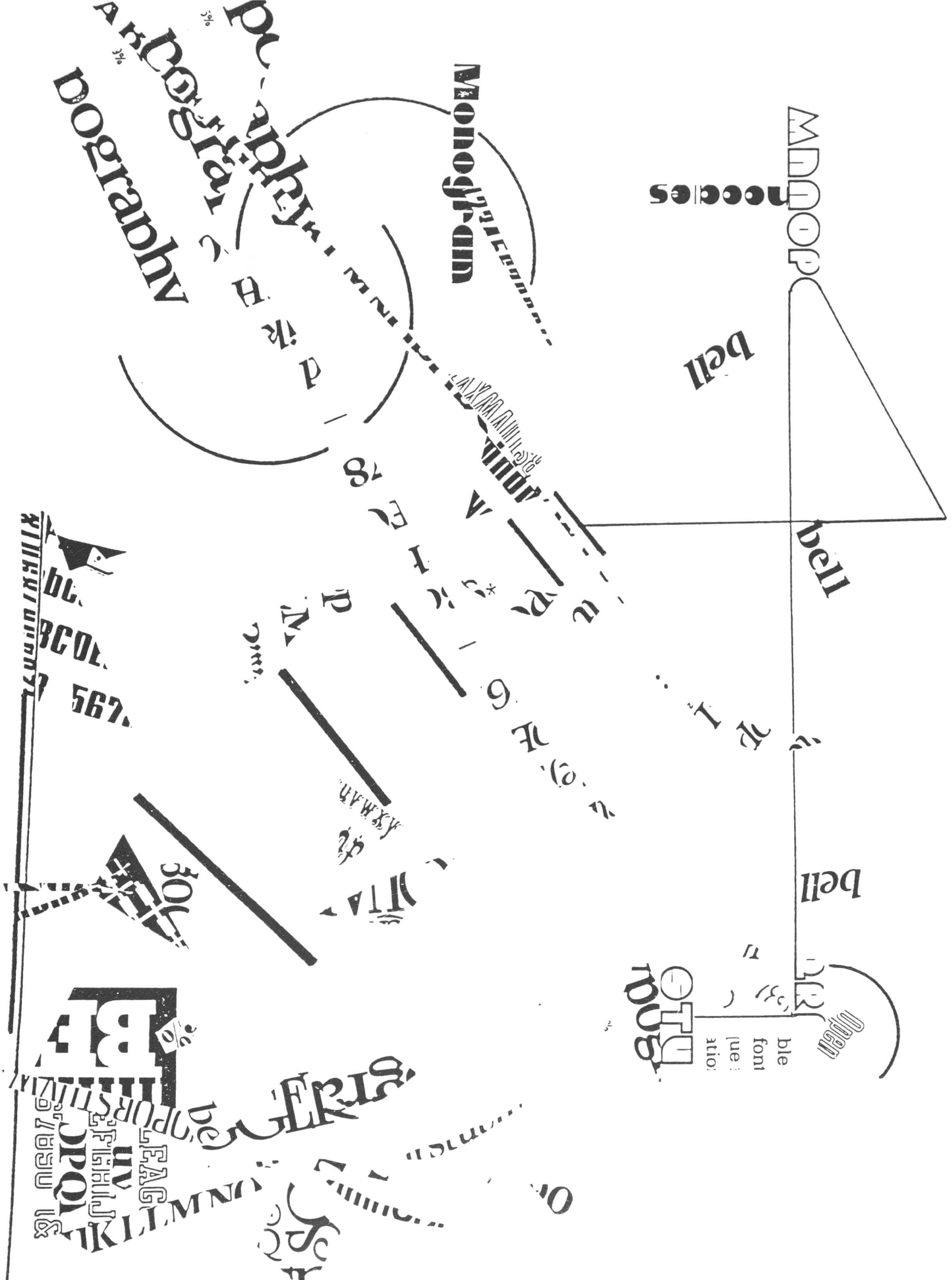
10. What, of course, it brings to me, as a believer in it, is all the rambling written above: that is, a stimulating intellectual, artistic life with touches of light tossed from one visual poet to another. Ironically, because visual poetry leads to beautiful artworks, it is always creating pieces of itself which need to be given away as gifts in order to free the poet to continue to discover, to tweak the receiver into replying in her/his own handmind, and to keep the channel alive and vibrating!

Visual poetry, like all poetry, brings the value of clarified, heightened, or calming experience; the intimate unknotting of the senses; the duck-into plumbing of the darkness. Poetry is evidence of inquiry, the gems brought back from journeys elsewhere and elsehow; visual poetry is a tracking of inquiry, a music of the breath before breathing, as breathing, direct gasp. Ah ha! as so soon eye said.

11. Zero . . . zero.

12. Definitely not by the government. And who knows who and when some private person will decide one's time has come!

Grants shmants! I am a cultural worker and deserve the same pay as any other research and development thinker.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PAUL G. COLLIER-WEIDENHOFF

Essay on Visual Poetry

In music, a solitary note is an illusion. One note consists of a series of expanding tones. The integrity (or unity) of this note is maintained by the motion of vibration from tone to tone. Motion, then, is the primary characteristic that creates the illusion of a solitary note.

In language, a solitary word is an illusion as well. One word consists of a series of expanding images. Again the integrity of the word is maintained by the motion of the internal eye from one image to the other. Motion, then, becomes the illusion of a solitary word. Motion is the syntax of language. This communicated word (which is dependent upon, but not a direct representation of the initial word) shall be termed from this moment on as the sound of the word. The sound then is what poetry seeks to bring into view (especially language poetry).

Poetry in the 20th century liberated the word from its images alone. We have taken that word and turned it into sound with visual properties. Now is the time to take the next step, to pose the next question: is language capable of expanding beyond this point without breaking or disintegrating into abstract syllables?

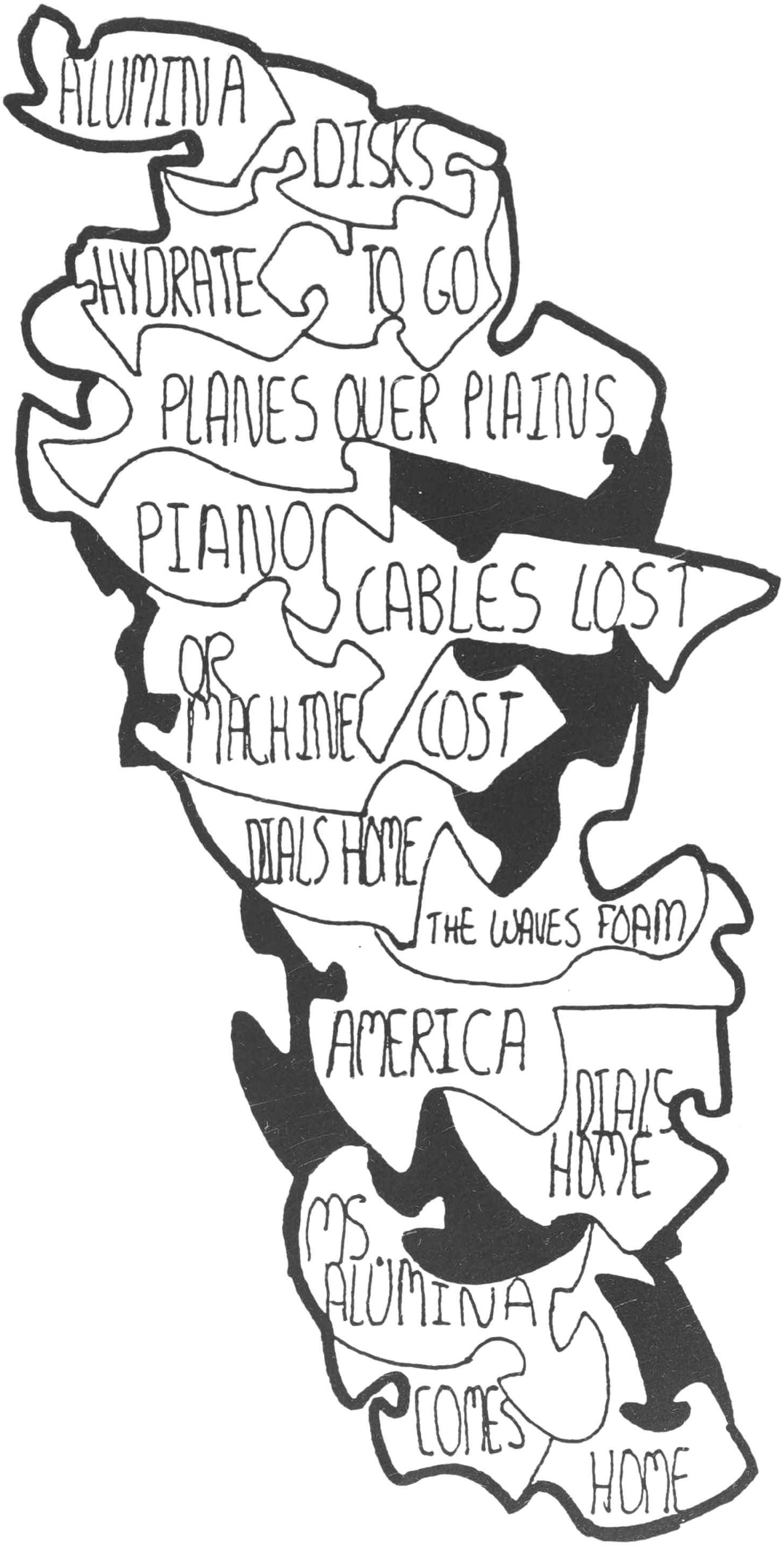
If the sound of a word can be presented as being influenced by, but not dependent upon, the initial word, it is then capable of creating a whole new series of images (or tones as in music). Again, the internal eye creates the motion by perusal. This motion creates a new sound. But do not forget the original sound.

The echo of the previous sound weaves itself through the new sound. New and simultaneous sounds are directly created from this pairing, bypassing the steps previously needed, or (in the case of language) bypassing the properties of syntax. Language then exists in a purely aesthetic state.

Visual poetry has the tools necessary to create such a state in language. How?

The visual element in visual poetry is the representation of the "sound in the word". By representing this sound in a concrete state, we are then liberating the sound from the word. Once this sound is contemplated as an autonomous "event", it will then take the next step quite naturally.

But how can the visual poet find this visual representation of the sound in words? Only if the visual poet allows the visual and language elements of the piece to evolve *simultaneously* can he hope to achieve this representation. Few visual poets have yet achieved this representation. However, with more "practice" and more dialogue among the visual poets, this representation may be achieved, and vindicate this abstract theory.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palaetiology palestra paizogony pailletee paillasse paigle
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paauw ozostomia oxythymous oxyrhynch oxyphony oxyosphresia
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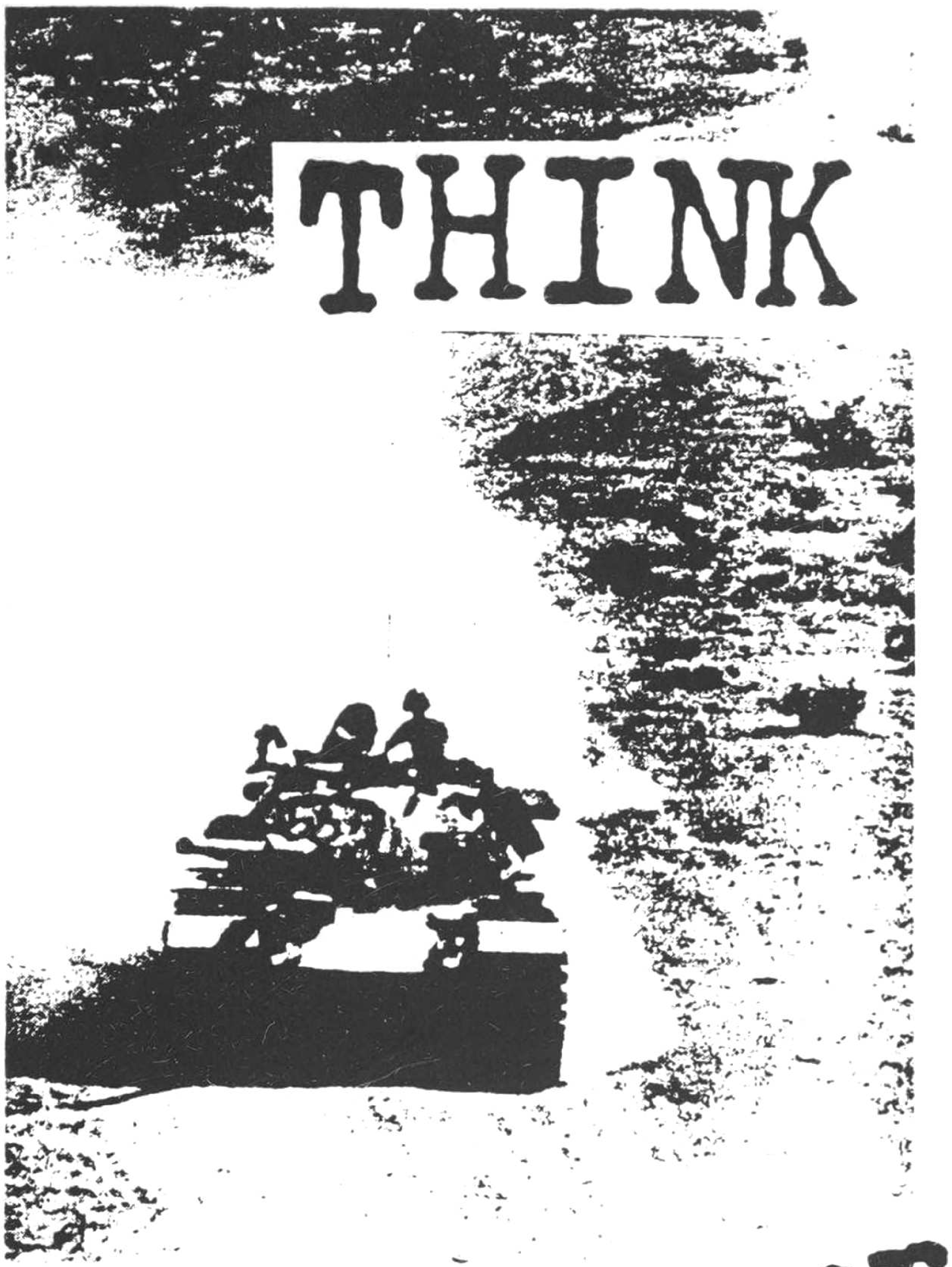
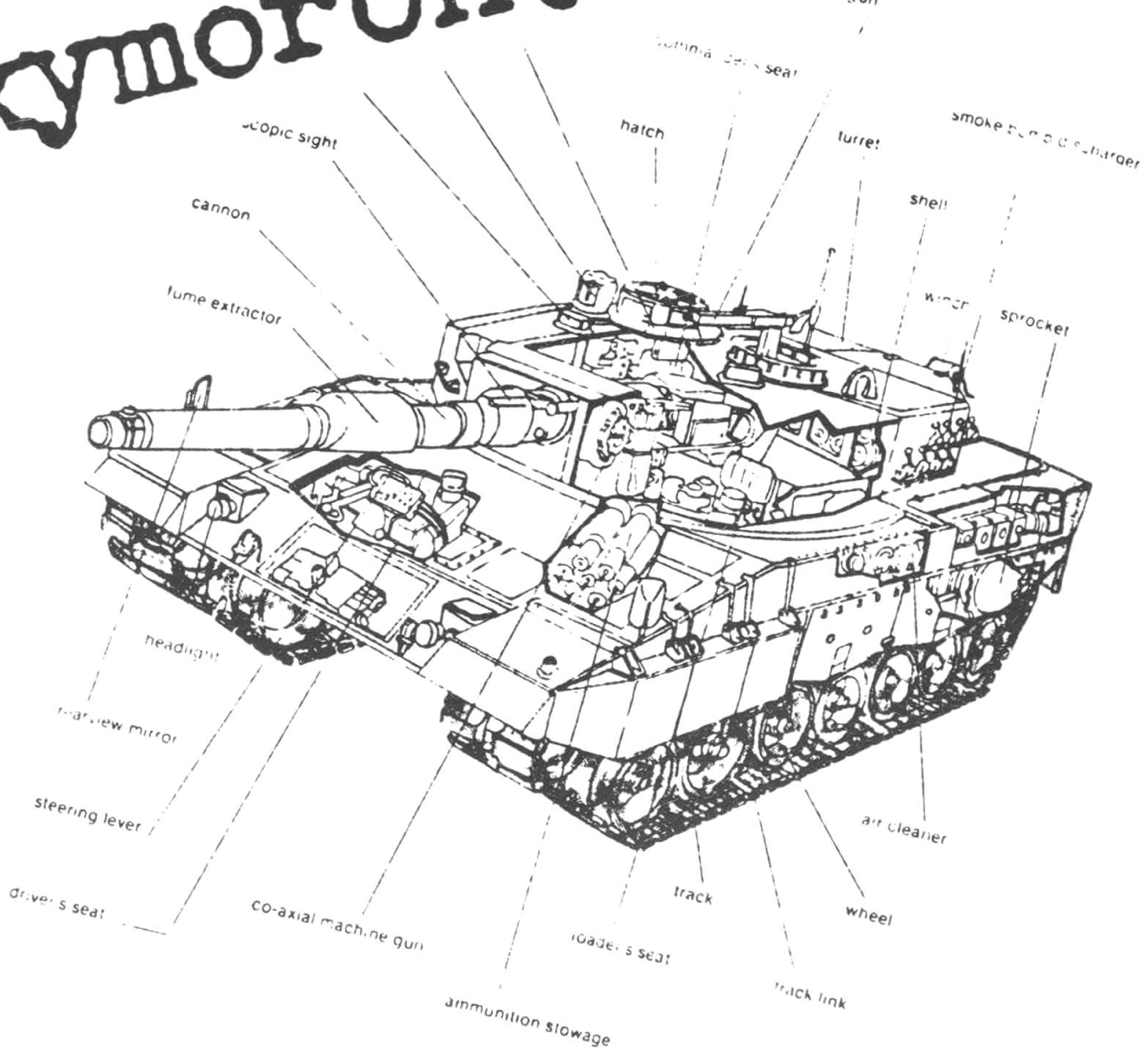
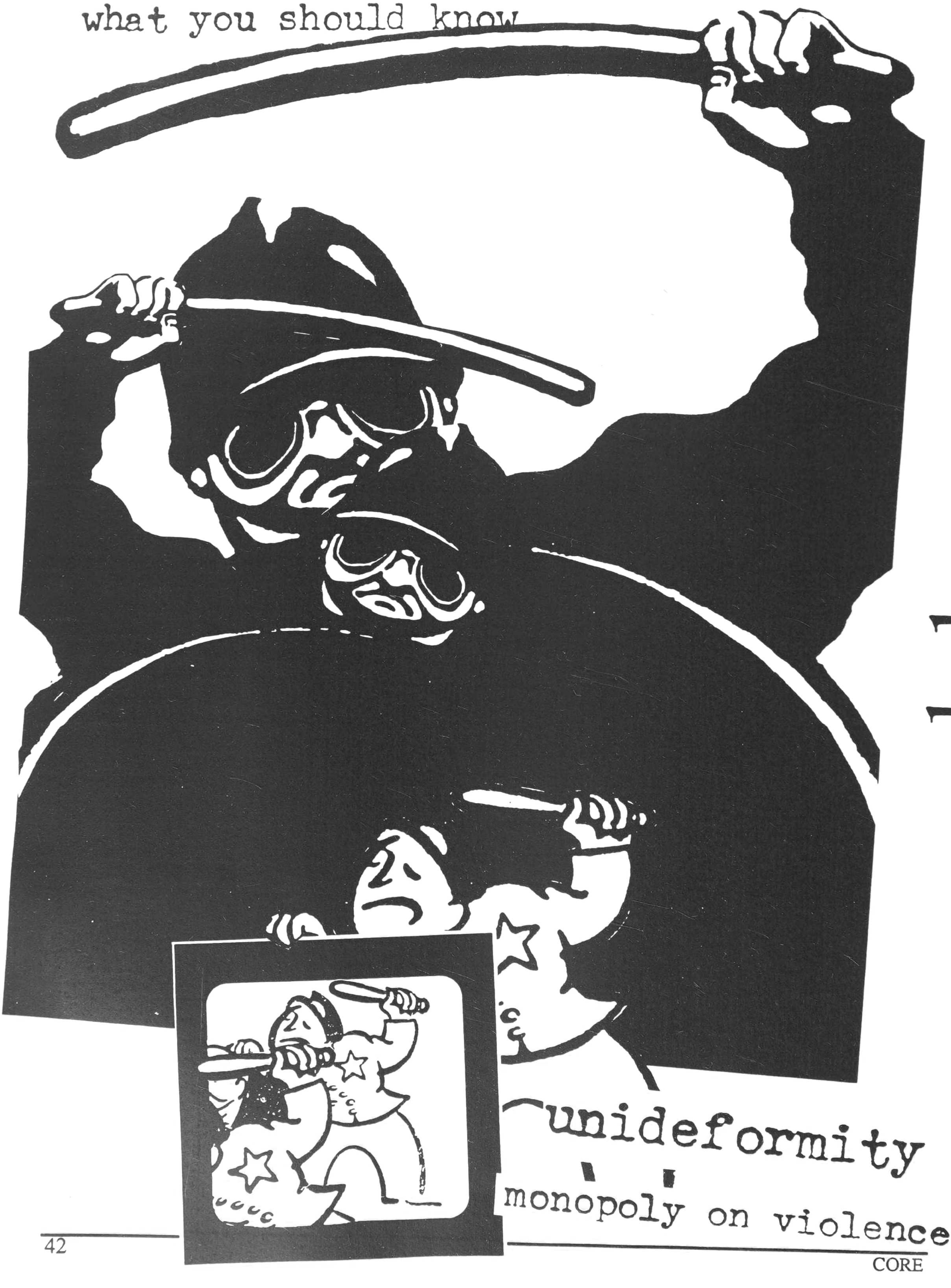


orthodoxymorontology


cupola
machine gun
commander's seat
periscopic sight
hatch
turret
smoke bomb discharger
cannon
shell
fume extractor
winch
sprocket
headlight
rearview mirror
steering lever
driver's seat
co-axial machine gun
ammunition stowage
loader's seat
track
track link
wheel
air cleaner

GOVERNMENTAL ILLNESS

what you should know


unideformity
monopoly on violence

dadata

DANIEL DAVIDSON

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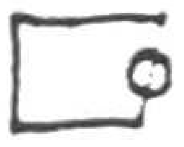
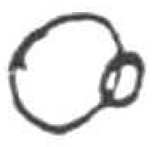
AVELINO DE ARAUJO

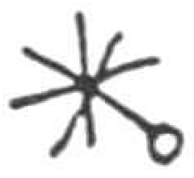
1. What qualities or characteristics distinguish 'visual poetry' from other poetic productions?



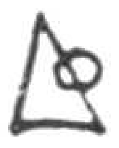
2. How do the 'visual' or 'graphic' elements in your work come to be 'read' as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers? Do you notice any contradictions, gaps, etc., which you must bridge in order to think the notion 'visual poetry'?



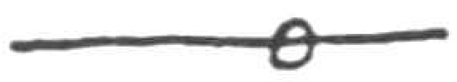
3. How do the kinds of meaning communicated by language occur/inhere in visual poetry, and, how do the kinds of meaning communicated in visual art occur in visual poetry? In other words, in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?



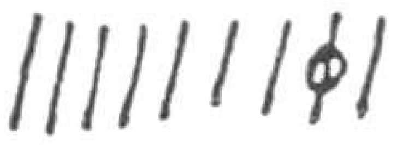
4. Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'?



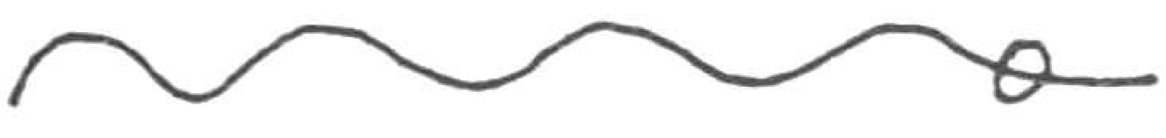
5. Which particular works or creators of visual poetry do you feel a kinship with in your own work?



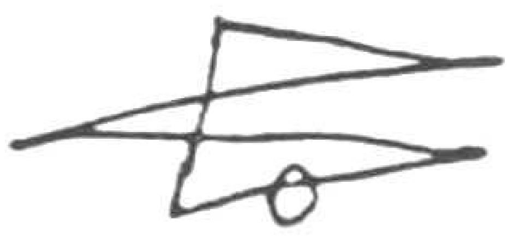
6. Do you participate in a community (or communities) of visual poets? If so, who and how?



7. Who is your audience?

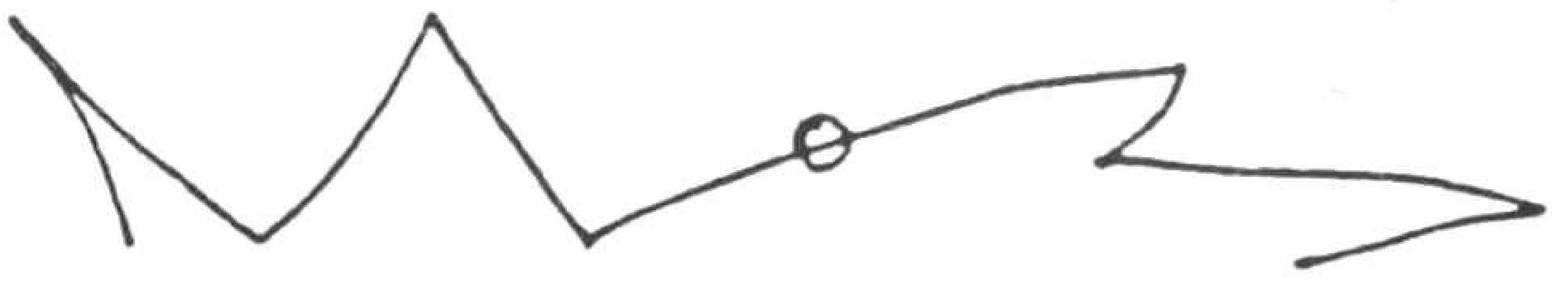


8. What do you think are the primary forums for your work? (For example, literary magazines, experimental publications, gallery shows, etc.)

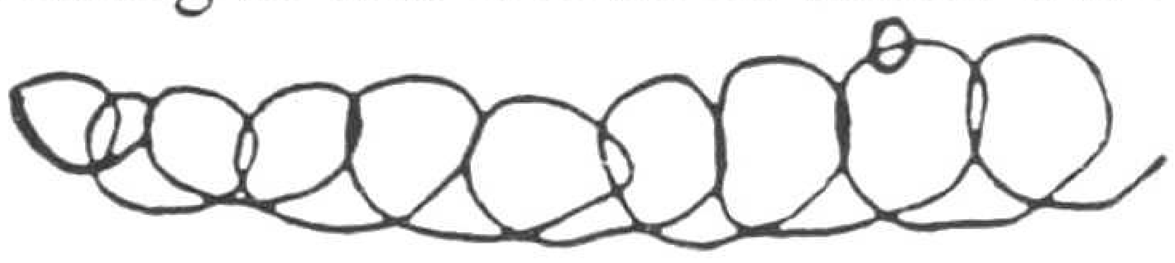


9. What do you judge to be the relevance of visual poetry to:
   a. prior (historical) poetic practice
   b. contemporary poetic practice
   c. contemporary socio-economic and/or political situations?

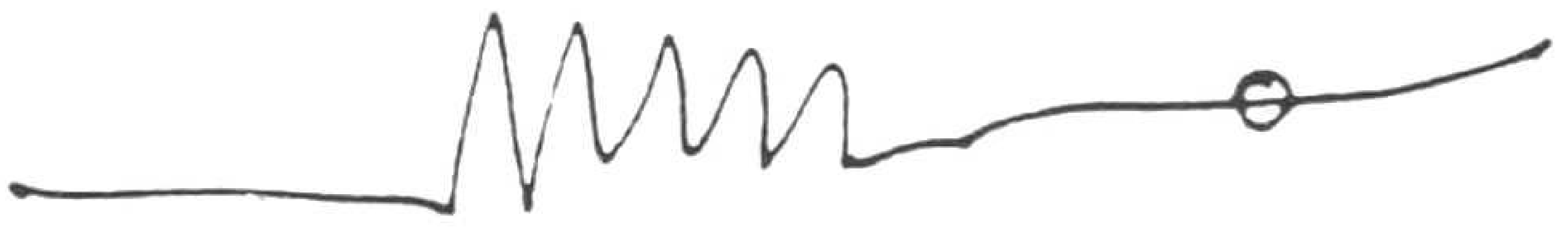
   In other words, how does visual poetry relate to your sense of our 'historic' and 'current situation'?



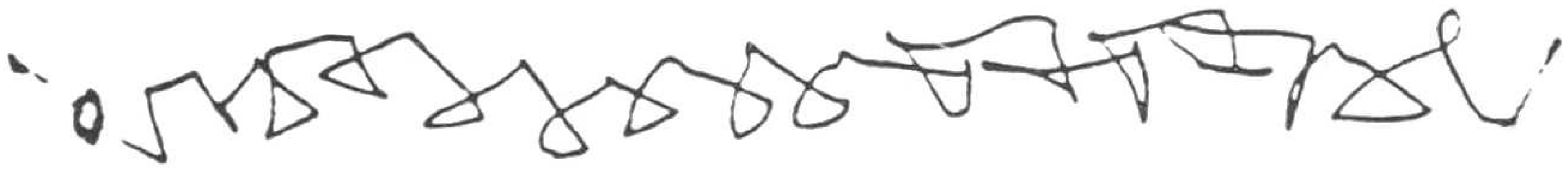
10. What values or benefits does/could/should visual poetry have in relation to our current situation? What does it bring to the world of those who view/read it?



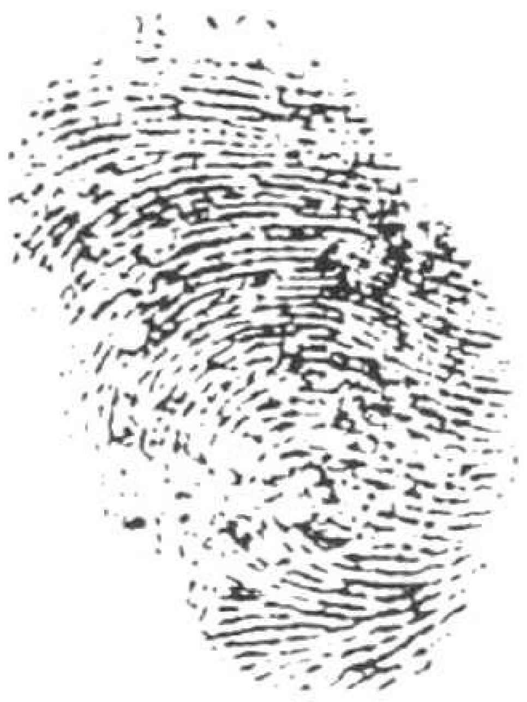
11. What percentage of your income is derived from your visual poetry work (including teaching, critical writing, etc.)? What percentage of that income is derived from government or private (i.e. corporate or foundation) grants?



12. Do you think visual poetry should be subsidized by government and/or private grants?



COMMENTS:



AVELINO
DE ARAUJO 92
•BRASIL•

KLAUS PETER DENCKER

Thanks for your invitation to say some words about Visual Poetry. I am doing this with great pleasure, because I am working since 1968 in this field and tried to explain all the years, especially at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, the difference between Concrete and Visual Poetry: Visual Poetry as an own literary form. In Germany the both notions Concrete and Visual Poetry before twenty years were mixed up. So I want to answer your questions first with a definition of Visual Poetry, what it is in my mind. Please excuse my bad english: so I want to answer in german, to be exact in the way of explaining what I mean.

1. Visuelle Poesie, das ist die wechselseitige Beziehung von bildender Kunst und Literatur, von Bild und Text, von figurativen und semantischen Elementen, die Verbindung beider Kunstformen in einem intermedialen Raum, die sensible Reaktion auf Mitteilungen der Umwelt jedweder Form, das Sammelbecken für wichtige Erkenntnisse aus Collage, Concept-Art, der Konkreten Kunst, der verschiedenen Varianten von Realismusvorstellungen, Spurensicherungen und allen denkbaren Spielarten logischer Sprachführung.

   Visuelle Poesie, das ist neben dem kalkulierten Spiel, dem gegen die Tradition gerichteten Experiment und dem mit ihren Erfahrungen entwickelten künstlerischen Entwurf, neue Sensibilisationsprozesse einzuleiten, auch Spiegel und Antwort auf die Entwicklung der Medienlandschaft, auf die in diesem Jahrhundert besonders starke wechselseitige Befruchtung und Durchdringung der Künste.

   Visuelle Poesie, das ist schließlich auch eine mögliche Kunstform in der Entwicklung unserer Informations – und Kommunikationsgesellschaft, eine Kunstform, die auf neue Formen der Medien reagieren kann, eine literarische Form unabhängig vom Medium Buch, die sich kreativ und innovativ in interaktiven Kommunikationsmodellen einbringt.

   Nach den traditionellen Medien bieten die gegenwärtigen (wie Computer, Holografie, Telekommunikation, Video, Laser, Multi Media usw.) ein unerschöpfliches Reservoir für die Weiterentwicklung der Visuellen Poesie und die Qualität ihrer Rezeption.

2. Das visuelle Element ist wohl aus zwei Gründen für mich wichtig geworden: einmal hat mein Studium der Japanologie meinen Blick auf die Visualisierung von Sprache gelenkt und zum anderen gab es in den 60er Jahren für uns damals ein starkes Mißtrauen gegenüber dem Vermögen traditioneller Schreibweisen. Materialbewußtsein stand gegen den Sprachverschleiß: das Wiedereinsetzen der Wörter in bewußt gemachte semantische Prozesse wurde wichtig. Da bot sich ganz einfach an, die Sprache Visuell "auseinander zu nehmen" und eine neue, neben der buchstäblichen, zu erfinden.

   Visuelle Poesie ist für mich seit dem Ende der 60er Jahre eine eigene literarische Kunstform, die international viele Entsprechungen besitzt: Visual Poetry, Poesia Visiva usw.

3. Siehe dazu die Bemerkungen in 1.

4. Ja.

5. Natürlich habe ich, wie viele meiner Kollegen aus der Tradition gelernt, aus den Beispielen der Antike, des Mittelalters, des Futurismus, von Kurt Schwitters und großen Fotocollagisten wie Yuri Rozhkov und John Heartfield.

Nach Ein-Blatt-Arbeiten zu Beginn habe ich aber schon früh an größeren Formen der Visuellen Poesie gearbeitet, an ganzen Geschichten (die längste ist bisher die REISE NACH ROM mit über 100 Blättern). Vorformen dazu und auch die besondere Art meiner Methode mit Text und figurativen Elementen umzugehen (wie in den WORTKÖPFEN oder in der REISE NACH ROM) habe ich allerdings noch nicht gefunden.

6. Aus 5 folgt, daß ich mit meiner besonderen Art zu arbeiten wohl nicht einer Gruppe zugerechnet werden kann (vgl.dazu auch Christina Weiss, Seh-Texte. Zur Erweiterung des Textbegriffs in konkreten und nachkonkreten Texten. Nürnberg 1984, S.306ff). Ich fühle mich aber international absolut eingebunden in die Gesamtbewegung der Visuellen Poesie. Das beweisen die Einladungen zu Ausstellungen und zur Mitarbeit an Publikationen seit über 20 Jahren.

7. Das ist schwer einzuschätzen und ehrlich gesagt, interessiert mich dies immer weniger, weil es mir um die Entwicklung einer bestimmten literarischen Form, nicht um den Markt oder Erfolg geht.

8. Hauptsächlich werden meine Arbeiten gedruckt (mehr im Ausland als im Inland), in Zeitschriften, Katalogen, Anthologien usw. Erst in zweiter Linie kommen bei mir Ausstellungen (da ich meine Originale nur ungern weggebe).

9. Die Relevanz der Visuellen Poesie habe ich ebenfalls schon in 1 angesprochen.

10. Die Bedeutung der Visuellen Poesie ist ebenfalls schwer einschätzbar. Richtig wird sein, daß sie eine experimentelle Ausdrucksform ist und damit dazu beiträgt, die künstlerischen Innovationsbereiche zu erweitern, aber auch die Rezeptionsformen, das produktive Kommunizieren des Betrachters.

    Vielleicht ist die Visuelle Poesie ein Durchgangsstadium für die Entwicklung ganz neuer künstlerischer Ausdrucksformen. Es hat immer wieder Hinweise auf diese Veränderungen gegeben, so z.Bsp. von Egon Friedell 1912 in seinem "Ecce Poeta" in dem Kapitel "Dichtkunst ist Atavismus", oder bei Helmut Heißenbüttel in seinem Beitrag "Zur Geschichte des visuellen Gedichts im 20.Jahrhunderts", in dem er 1963 bereits sagte: "Wohin diese Richtung zielt, kann heute noch kaum deutlich gesagt werden. Zu vermuten ist, daß die Entwicklung einem neuen Stadium menschlicher Äußerung überhaupt zustrebt".

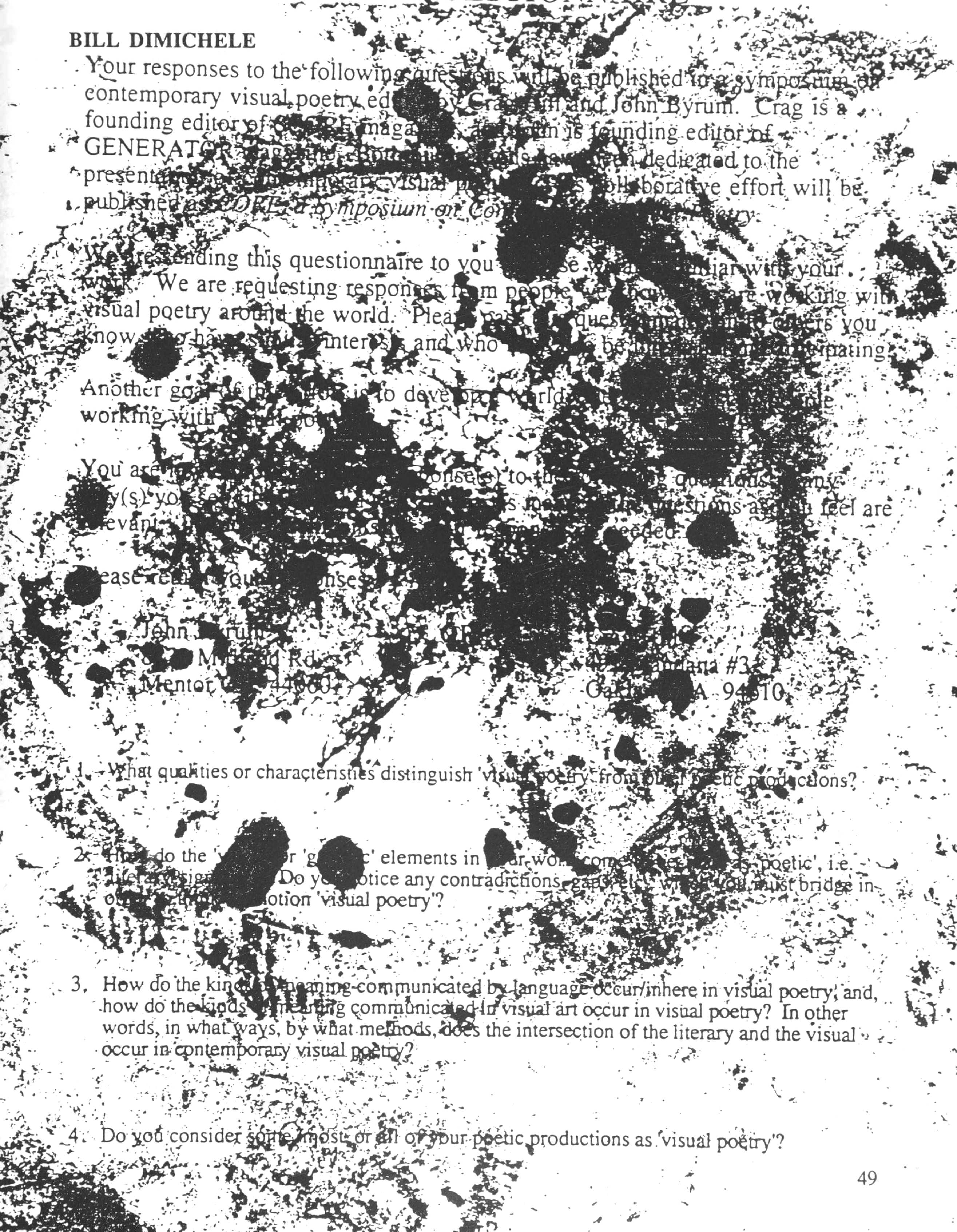
11. Verschwindend gering.

12. Es wäre schön, wenn es Förderungen gäbe (eine private gibt es ja schon lange durch das Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archiv in Miami Beach). Aber vielleicht benötigt diese Kunstform jene nicht subventionierte Randstellung, um nicht einer zu großen Vereinnahmung zu unterliegen.

I hope, dear friends, this ist not to long.

CORE QUESTIONNAIRE

BILL DIMICHELE



Your responses to the following questions will be published in a symposium on contemporary visual poetry ed[illegible] by Crag [illegible] and John Byrum. Crag is a founding editor of [illegible] magazine, and [illegible] is founding editor of GENERATOR [illegible] dedicated to the presenta[illegible] visual p[illegible] collaborative effort will be published as *CORE: a symposium on Con[illegible]* [illegible] *poetry.*

We are sending this questionnaire to you [illegible]se [illegible] with your work. We are requesting responses from people [illegible] are working with visual poetry around the world. Plea[illegible] questionnaire [illegible] others you know [illegible] interests and who [illegible] be [illegible]pating.

Another goa[illegible] is to develop [illegible] world[illegible] le working with [illegible]

You are [illegible]onse(s) to th[illegible]g questions [illegible] any [illegible]y(s) yo[illegible]s [illegible] questions a[illegible] feel are [illegible]evant [illegible] eeded.

[illegible]ease re[illegible] your [illegible]onses

John [illegible]rum
[illegible] M[illegible]d Rd.
Mentor [illegible] 4406[illegible]

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Oak[illegible]A 94[illegible]10

1. What qualities or characteristics distinguish 'visual poetry' from [illegible] productions?

2. How do the '[illegible]r 'g[illegible]c' elements in [illegible] work come [illegible] 'poetic', i.e. literary sig[illegible] Do y[illegible] notice any contradictions, gaps, [illegible] you must bridge in o[illegible] notion 'visual poetry'?

3. How do the kind[illegible] meaning communicated by language occur/inhere in visual poetry, and, how do the kinds [illegible] meaning communicated in visual art occur in visual poetry? In other words, in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?

4. Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'?

CORE Questionnaire
Page 2
5. Which particular works or areas of visual poetry do you identify with in your own work?
6. Do you participate in collaborative or community projects? If so, who and how
7. Who is your audience?
8.
political situation
11. What percentage of your income
critical writing, etc.)? What percentage
(including teaching,
corporate or foundation) grants
m government or private
12. Do you think visual poetry should be funded by government
or private grants?
COMMENTS
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surface
Type W-5 finish
(Not used) (Work shal
all concrete.)

JOHANNA DRUCKER

THE VISUAL MATERIAL RESISTS THE VERBAL

1-12. I began with letterpress, holding the language in my hands. Now to the computer

EXPECTATIONS. THE CLEAN MACHINE OF READING

searching for the shape in the murky pixels on the screen. Not all of writing has to be

HESITATES, DISRUPTED BY THE INTERFERING

treated to this breach of decorum, only some, which permits its own laboratory explor-

SUBSTANCE WHICH DISTRACTS THE EYE. THE

ations. Mallarme remains, of course, the major point of reference, though he was not my

LOOK OF LITERATURE IS NOT A SURPLUS, EXCESS, NOT SOME

original source, which lay, simply, in the handling of elements in the typecase, and in trying

TRIVIAL ADDITIVE MISBEHAVING BY A FLAMBOYANT

to solve problems in the works through visual and graphic means. A community exists, but my

BID FOR ATTENTION, BUT RATHER, THE THICK FLIGHT OF

sense of my work is really separate. The old concretists of the 1950s and 60s seem reductive

FANCY STUCK IN THE HOT FORM OF LETTERS ON A

and simply by and large, and the zaum typography of Iliazd in some ways comes closest to my

PAGE, WRESTLING, EMBRACING, STRUGGLING WITH

own sensibility. I have always believed, in sense, not nonsense, and the Dada gestures offer

THE EXPRESSIVE FORM IN APPREHENSION. LEARNING TO

some tools, now that I study them, as do the Constructivist and Futurist designers and poets.

LOOK THE EYE, DELIGHTED, RETURNS THE ABSENT, ELUSIVE

Closer to my own generation there are, of course, all kinds of people -- but I find myself most

PROPERTIES OF SUGGESTION TO THE BODY OF THE

drawn to them in academic ways, for the sake of understanding, talking about, writing about,

TEXT, ENJOYING BOTH PLEASURE AND FRUSTRATION AT

their work, rather than as source material. My favorite inspirations remain the virtuouso

THE UNCONTAINABLE AFFECT GENERATED IN THE STUFF,

projects of unnamed typographers of late 19th century advertising, of 20th century graphics

ITSELF UNQUALIFIABLE, UNLOCATABLE IN ANY

before auteur design, though some of that – Bayer and Tschichold and Rand and now Licko

SIMPLE MAP OF MEANING. THIS CONCEPT OF VOICE IS HAND-

and Grieman and others certainly provides visual ideas and stimulation. My audience seems to

WRITING, MINE, MADE ON THE PAGE AND IN THE MOUTH,

be a combination of poets, critics and book arts people, all of whom have various takes on the

TACKLING THE TASK OF MAKING ITSELF MOMENT TO MOMENT

materials – and of course, my family, my father in particular, whose own lifetime of work in

FOR THE SAKE OF SOME UNUTTERABLE ACCIDENT OR

design makes him particularly appreciative of the formal solutions. I show my work in

INCIDENT OF RECOGNITION. THE GESTALT

bookstores like WPA and Printed Matter, and galleries, especially Granary Books in New

ESCAPES ITS OWN CONTAINMENT, REFERRING TO

York, but also in exhibitions. Bettert Bright at Minnesota Center for the Book Arts has been

THE WORLD OF SOCIAL POLITICS AND ASSOCIATIONS,

very active in this area. A lot of rare book librarians and poetry archive curators are interested

QUESTIONABLE, VARIOUS AND SUSPECT. THE ANGEL OF

and very appreciative as well -- certainly the Waldrops have encouraged this activity at Brown,

ENLIGHTENED REASON AND THE FORCE OF

Anne Anninger at the Houghton (Harvard), Robert Berthoff up at Buffalo and the people at

HARD FACT ARE EQUALLY ILL AT EASE IN THE META-

San Diego State in the Poetry Archive, to name only a few. Then of course there are the

PHYSICAL ARENA OF THE VISUAL VERNACULAR, THE

collectors -- where would we be without Marvin Sackner! I like showing the work, putting it

TABLOID PULP OF DAILY LANGUAGE AND THE ESOTERIC

into reproduction, especially as I do such small editions. I would love to do a reprint of my

FIELD OF CONTINUALLY EXPLODED INVENTION. BUT THIS IS

own books, of course, but also, to see an anthology of the New Visual Poetry -- stuff of the

THE REALM OF THE LITERATE AND PHYSICAL, THE

last ten or fifteen years. It is hard to get a good sense of all that is out there and how

PLAGUED AND DISPLAYED, THE IMMODEST AND

representative the small sample of things one comes across actually is relative to the bigger

RETREATING, RETRENCHED, ENTRENCHED GAMBLORS

picture. Since all the other manifestations of visual poetry I know of are certainly historically

WITH SENSATION. RESISTANCE TO LINGUISTIC CLOSURE

specific, then it seems clear that my own practice, and that of my contemporaries, is equally

DOES NOT LEAD TO ESCAPE, TO CHAOS OR TO NONSENSE

informed by current theory, and that as writers we are very much formed through context and

BUT TO THE REPLETE AND MARKED, THE LOST AND THE FOUND

circumstance of langauge and event and theory. I guess I ultimately aspire to a kind of tabloid

OF MISCELLANEOUS AND POTENT VALUES. THE

pulp of graphic language -- somewhere between the Mallarmean project and Flaubert's

TEXT, LIKE ANY OTHER ORGANISM, REJOICES IN

Bouvard and Pecuchet -- but updated to the so-called new millenial sensibility. I haven't been

THE PINBALL GAMES OF TOUCH AND UNCERTAINTY

funded too much by grants for my books -- letterpress work is cheap to produce, except for

WHICH MULTIPLY THE POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT labor, though I did have a nice grant from Pyramid Atlantic a couple years ago to do Simulant

WITH AN AUDIENCE, EXCHANGE, OF SATISFYING

Portrait in offset and Macintosh. I make enough money to keep funding my own projects, buy

CONVERSATION LAID OUT ON THE TABLE TO

equipment, and be productive, but I think money spent for the arts, in any form, is always a

SEDUCE THE EYE. ALL THE METAPHORS OF INTERNAL AND

good idea whether it comes from the government or private sources. There is a tendency, I

EXTERNAL DISTINCTION DISSOLVE IN THE THICK

think, to consider most visual poetry a form of cleverness and to dismiss its possible serious

ATMOSPHERE WHICH SURROUNDS,

character in the name of some kind of literary purity. It has always seemed to me that part

REFUSING A NEAT TOPOGRAPHY OF LOCI ACCORDING TO

of the resistance to visual work is that it presents a threat to the authority of the text. By

WHICH SOME RULES OF A NEW ORDER MIGHT BE MADE TO

calling attention to many of the material aspects of production, the visual form -- when it is

DISCIPLINE THE OLD LANGUAGE IN ITS WAYWARD

obviously manipulated, makes very clear marks of the site and subject of enunciation -- as

EXHIBITIONISM. A FLAYED AND MUCH DECORATED

well as the historical circumstances. For anyone still attached to the character of text as a

LEXICON, STRUTTING ITS STUFF IN THE NEW

form of truth this sort of relativisation is profoundly threatening. Then, of course, there is

SYNTAX OF THE SPECTACULAR, PARADING THRU THE

the critical resistance to being split, as a reader, between reading and looking, between the

SYNAPTIC NETWORK WITH A RUSH OF STIMULATING

visual presence of apprehendable substance and the literary value of what is supposedly an

FRICTION, NOW IN THE FLESH, THEN TO THE RETINA, HERE ON

absence -- as if one could make those distinctions.

THE PAGE.

JOHANNA DRUCKER
April 2, 1992 New York City

KATHY ERNST

1. The main quality that distinguishes visual poetry from other types of poetry is form. In visual poetry, the form or format becomes integrated with what the poem says *so completely* that changing the form destroys or changes the meaning of the poem.

2. I have been called a minimalist in visual poetry. What this means in my case is that the graphic elements in my poems are words, letters, or parts of letters. Therefore they are literary signifiers as well as graphic signifiers.

3. For me, poetry has always indicated rhythm. In visual poetry, I see rhythm indicated by spacing and placement of the visual elements that make up the poem.

4. I do both traditional and visual poetry, but by far more visual poetry. If the visual poems are three-dimensional (sculptural) or four-dimensional (changing over a period of time), I often refer to them as "artist's books", because gallery directors aren't often familiar with the term "visual poetry".

5. I feel a kinship with visual poets who focus on the letter as a graphic element – such as Scott Helmes and Karl Kempton, for example.

6. I correspond and collaborate most with David Cole and Marilyn R. Rosenberg.

7. The audience for my work consists of:
   a. people who go to galleries
   b. mail artists
   c. people who read literary magazines

8. The primary forums for my art are:
   a. galleries
   b. mail art
   c. literary magazines

9. a. Visual poetry seems to me to be a natural flow from prior poetic practices, but I think for many people it is such a radical break that they can't understand why it is considered to be poetry.

   b. Although to some extent I still read and enjoy traditional contemporary poetry, I find it offers me little stimulation compared to the excitement I find in seeing other people's visual poetry.

   Traditional contemporary poetry quite often doesn't seem to speak today's language. That is to say, it doesn't reach people today because they quite often don't even see it. The pace of life is faster today than ever before. People are assailed by increasing amounts of written material. Most people deal with this material by merely glancing at it and discarding unless something *at first glance* strikes them as interesting or important. Thus, they have become more visual.

   I often find myself reading the first four or five lines of a traditional poem and thinking, "Oh, no – not another deep, mystical experience!" Now, on the one hand, I do realize that my quick pre-judgement might be depriving me of discovering something wonderful, but I've found that's usually not the case. And, on the other hand, I'm incredibly busy, and I must pick and choose what I can spend time on. When I see a visual poem, I can tell immediately whether I want to examine it more closely or not.

10. I think that visual poetry is a rich tapestry of experience for those who read and understand it. Who those people are, I'm not sure. Sometimes I think it's mostly those of us who create it looking at each other's works. That's o.k., though, because one of the best things about being involved with visual poetry is the group of super people I've met either in person or by correspondence. Mail Art has been a wonderful way for many of us to communicate directly without editorial prejudice coming between the artist-artist interaction. I think that compared to other fields in the arts, we have incredibly supportive, helpful, interested people.

11. Perishingly little income is derived from my visual poetry. What little income there is comes from occasional gallery sales.

12. I am not in favor of visual poetry being subsidized by government grants. I think that once such a practice is started, and people become dependent on those grants, government rules and stipulations become stricter and more irritating, and ultimately gain such a stranglehold on the artist that they affect the artwork negatively. (Can you guess from this comment that I currently work for a government agency?)

Private grants may not be as bad, but these are also controlling.

BILL FOX

1. I conceive of visual poetry as occurring in an iconographic, pictorial field, as opposed to upon a sequential, linear surface. The field of the visual poem is less neutral for me, given less to rules by default, more interactive with the artist and the piece itself.

2. Visual elements of my work may have less to do with poetic signification than with sculptural or architectonic ones. While some visual poets may use graphic elements as a self-referential metaphor (for instance, a text about the act of reading printed in a circle to induce physical involvement of the reader in the act itself), others may be more concerned about the use of positive and negative space in the manifestation of the piece (as in the three-dimensional work of Ian Hamilton Finlay or in the two-dimensional pieces of Franz Mon.)

   I don't notice gaps between the poetic and the visual, whether I'm working on a text piece or a sculpture. That comes later, in the minds of editors, readers, viewers, critics. My visual art usually includes words; my texts usually incorporate a visual element. A gap would exist for me only if one were not there to influence the other.

3 & 4. We are all working on sets of ideas, be they political or social concerns; the working out of chaos and information theory in texts and music; the appearance of landscape as a character in fiction and film – and we seek to manifest the processes of our thinking and feeling about, our creating in and around these ideas, in any number of various media. Perhaps a neurophysicist could untangle how meaning occurs; what interests me is how we aren't so easily contained as painters, composers, sculptors or poets, but function more completely as artists using the media we need to help meaning occur. Concrete poetry was one of many artistic movements during this century that led to this fruitful decategorization – dada and fluxus are two more.

5. The artists with whom there might exist kinship, that is a familial relationship between their work and mine, include: Emmett Williams, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Carl Stone, Arakawa, Carl Andre, Vernon Fisher, Joseph Cornell, Tu Fu, Francis Ponge, Max Ernst, Dieter Roth, Ed Ruscha, Bob Cobbing, Kurt Schwitters, Lawrence Weiner, Jenny Holzer, John Adams, Arvo Part, Kirk Robertson, Robert Lax, Harold Budd, Ingram Marshall, Eugen Gomringer, most everyone published by Something Else Press and edition hansjorg mayer, and most minimalists of any stripe. The emphasis is upon things and upon things in series, versus traditional sequencing.

6. I read and listen to music and see shows. I visit friends, send and receive letters. I sometimes work alone and sometimes in collaboration. I'm happy to live where I do, not too close nor too far from others. I can't separate out a community of visual poets from the other people in my life, anymore than I can say whether or not I am a "regional writer". To do so is to force a gap where none exists, to be exclusionary about vast tracts of my life.

7. You.

8. Small visual arts galleries and two, perhaps three magazines. Far more of my work has been exhibited than published in the last decade. That's due partly to the conservatism of literature, which is based on the economics of publishing and academic tenure, and the contrapuntal economics of the visual arts world, which is driven by that which is new versus that which is old.

9. Dick Higgins, Richard Kostelanetz and Robert Morgan can answer these questions better than I. Otherwise, I merely find it useful to note that there are many words in paintings and installations, in dance and performance art, on MTV and in cans of soup.

10. Art takes us from where we are to where we haven't been. I consider that a basic survival skill.

11. None of my income is derived directly from my art. Because I work for a state arts agency, however, all of my income is publicly funded. The ironies are manifold.

12. I think all artists should have equal opportunity to apply for public funds, and that the work done by visual poets should have as good a chance to receive public and private grants as any other kind of work. I don't think that's currently the case and both your questions and my responses point to some of the reasons why – our work falls upon borders. Most of it is considered irrelevant by those who don't do it, and there are only a few of us interested in this kind of work.

The literature panel at the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts], upon which I happily sat for four years in the early 80's, was and is composed primarily of terrific people who nonetheless have little experience with or sympathy for visual literature. The visual arts panel, likewise, doesn't cope well with textworks done by people who define themselves as visual poets. The reasons are obvious.

PETER GANICK

The question of the role of visible poetry as a partner in my writhing is definite.

Patterns plague the soft syntactic that characterizes work from without I have not yet written.

Of has been written, Avenue B has brought out a book whose three parts are visible. Anywhere one steps calls for priority of hangout before a careen through limitations of choices that culminate in pattern.

"th" (a non-word) was replaced, yet holes in paper become scandals betimes the metamorphosis identified as cause of "the". Phrase on phrase.

"you pool theatre" fades in as arrangement of signs by capitulated intention. A face becomes alternative if the reader appear blind.

"untitled (Web)" reasons with Ray DiPalma's *Raik*. "u(W)" samples a strength at once gone back that drowns form, intent and coils.

"epilogue" (in a sanitized version, much improved by the publisher) privileges attention to typeface often a durable throng insisting realignment after scarcity. Nearby the truant of moment – here the prisoner of what's best.

RAINER GOLCHERT

Consideration

In my opinion it is possible to draw a distinction between two main kinds of visual poetry.

A. Visual poetry which consists only of words, letters and ciphers

Here you find a direct recognizable rhythm which is created by the use of geometric order and the dividing of the room. The melody in this poetry is formed by the type and the "graphic elements" within the type.

In relation to this poetry, in "traditional" poetry the rhythm is not recognizable at first sight. It is a rhythm which is determined by the metrics. For finding the rhythm it is indispensable to *read* the text. The melody of "traditional" poetry is determined by the diction.

So in visual poetry and "traditional" poetry there is the conformity of having rhythm and melody, but there are fundamental differences in the ways rhythm and melody are created.

B. Visual poetry which consists of language and pictorial elements

Here you can find a clear difference between pictorial elements and the text.

First there is the possibility of pure illustration of text. This can not be exactly separated from visual poetry.

For visual poetry there is the possibility of "symbolization", i.e. simple language meanings are translated into visual representation by using symbols which can not be misunderstood. This "symbolization" is an important element of the advertisement. Here it is used for building up a compact message which is recognizable quickly without any time-wasting by reading a text.

Advertisement, of course, is not a kind of visual poetry in every case.

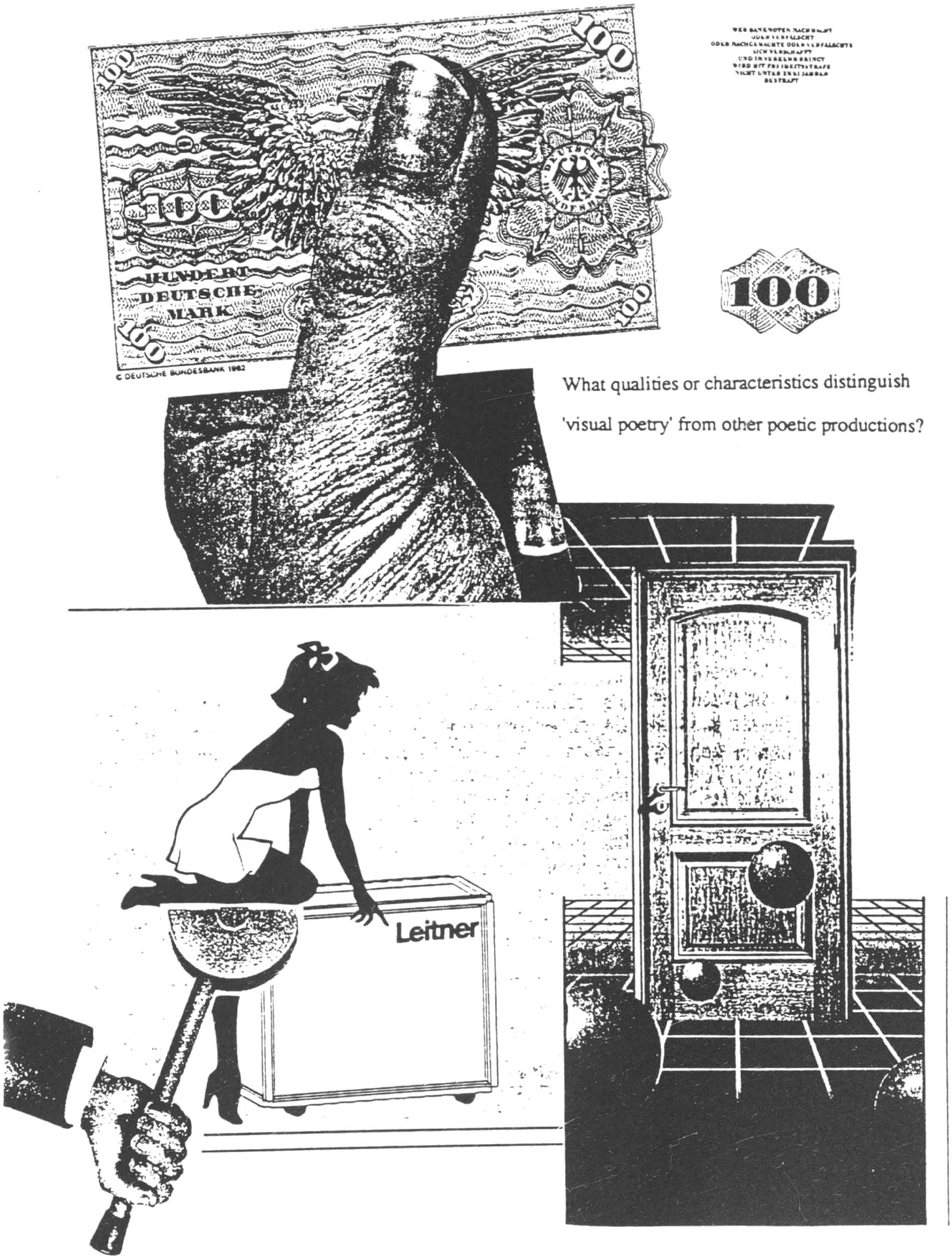
"Symbolization" at its best is found in quips.

Visual poetry is able to be more than an illustrated text or a translation of meanings from one medium into another. In visual poetry, literary and visual elements are not a collection of two styles but a melted form of expression which takes its merit from the fusion.

Visual poetry does not have to fit for short clear interpretations. It is not aimed to give all viewers/readers the same idea of its meaning. The most important intention of visual poetry is to give viewers/readers and the author himself a chance for a free development of thoughts.

To answer some other questions:

I do not consider all of my works as "visual poetry". I am working with multi-media, so there are a lot of works which are other kinds than literary. I have edited *Manschette* magazine, which contained visual poetry as well as other kinds of art. Now I am a member of Absurdistische Liga and beside writing I take part in gallery shows.



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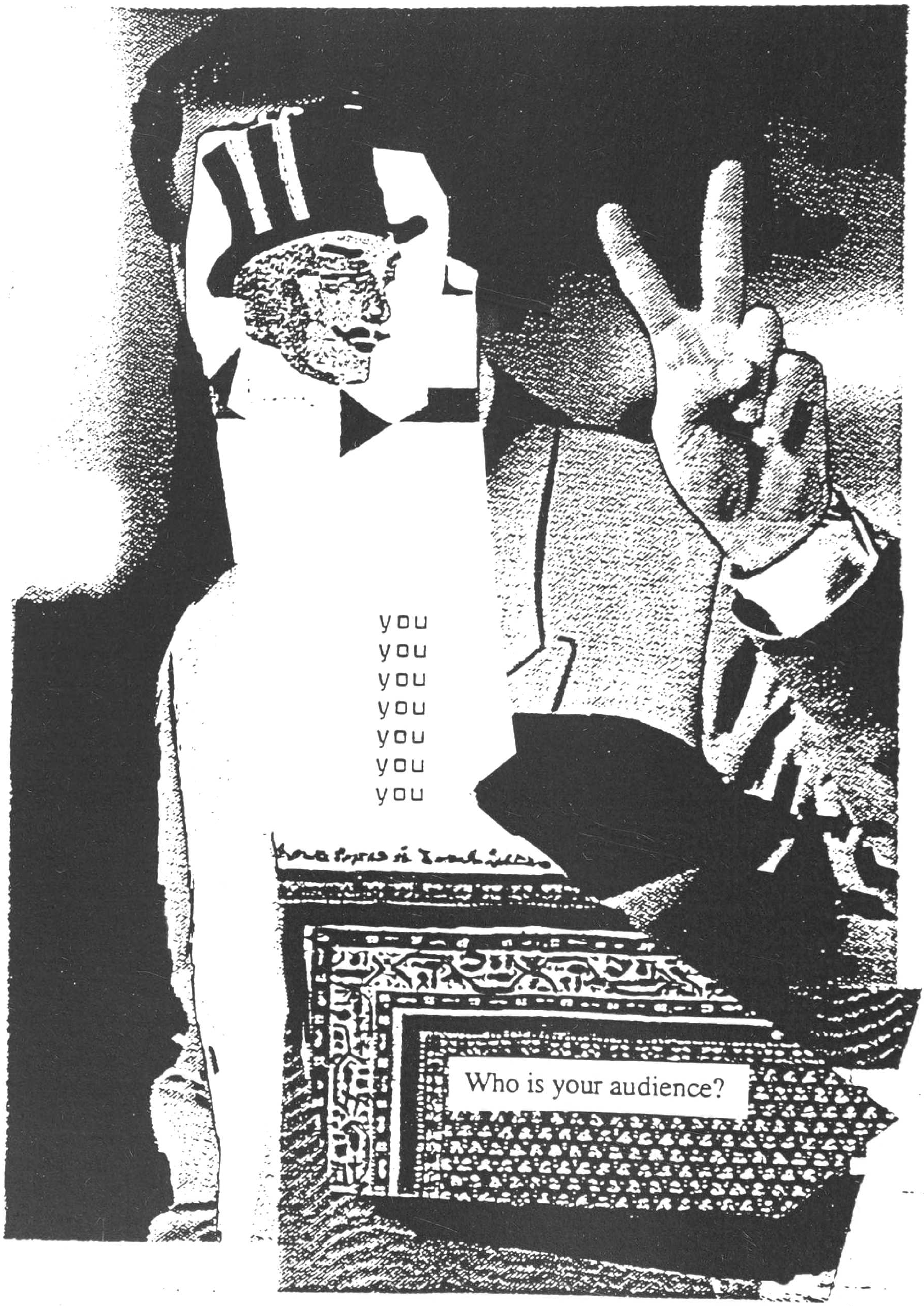
Leitner

What qualities or characteristics distinguish

'visual poetry' from other poetic productions?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you
Who is your audience?

Rainer Golchert

LEROY GORMAN

1-4. –

5. Right off, I think of bp Nichol and Dom Sylvester Houedard. Some of my landscape visuals have roots in their pioneering. Of course there are so many others – Edwin Morgan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and on and on . . .

6. I can't really say that I participate in a community of visual poets, other than the "community of the mail" – most of my contacts are through the mail. I do participate in a group of haiku poets that meets at least once a year. Some of these people have visual leanings.

7. My audience is made up of haiku poets, visual poets, and, to some degree, kids.

8. Experimental publications are the primary forums for me. But I do get an occasional taker in a lit mag and in the odd glossy.

9. My visual work may have its most relevance in the context of haiku. Much of my visual work is haiku or haiku-like. The spartan qualities of haiku appeal to me, and I suppose this comes through as minimalist in my visuals, which are often essences with no extras. Whenever possible, I try to be political. I have composed a number of visual satires and found visuals.

10. I'm not sure whether I'm really answering this question, but here goes. Personally, I value visual poetry because it offers me, in some cases, the only meaningful form of expression. My devotionals, for example, couldn't happen any other way. Any other form of expression could not come close to providing me with the type of catharsis I feel when working them out in the visuals.

11. Very little of my income comes directly from visual writing. If I'm lucky, I'll get a couple of invitations a year to do a talk/workshop with kids, and this can bring me two to three hundred dollars a time. Then (again if luck is with me) I'll have a piece or two appear in a paying periodical. Here I may get one to two hundred dollars (government grant money, likely). And then it's downhill from there. So, to pay the bills, I teach high school English.

BOB GRUMMAN

1. Visual poetry significantly combines the visual with the verbal. It does this, according to my not-widely-shared definition of visual poetry, by using its visual component as a significant metaphor for some central portion of its verbal component.

   To be combative, I should add that for any artwork to be a kind of poetry, including visual poetry, it must, in my view, be verbal – that is, it must contain words (or near-words, such as abbreviations). This doesn't mean I disdain visio-textual artworks that contain "infra-verbal" matter – random scattered letters, say, or illegible scraps of apparent sentences – but no words. I love Paul Klee's "The Villa R.", for instance. It's just that I don't call such artworks visual poetry. It makes no taxonomic sense to do so, and a sensible taxonomy is where any serious communicable understanding of an artform must begin. (My relevant taxonomy begins with the term "vizlature", by the way. This refers to any art which contains both visual and textual elements of esthetic significance.)

2.a. They don't. But the textual elements come to express visual meanings by being arranged so as to suggest such visual images as butterflies in flight, windblown flowers, clothing hung out to dry, etc.

2.b. No, but I have trouble at times distinguishing genuine visual poetry from textual poetry which contains visual elements that seem decorative only but may have metaphoric significance (e.g., calligraphy). There is also the problem of textual poetry which shares a page with visual art that does not seem related to the poetry but might be.

3. I hate to sound supercilious, but it seems to me that the language in visual poetry communicates its meaning the same way there that it does anywhere else – by representing things and events with words. And the visual part of visual poetry communicates with shapes and colors, the same way it does in purely visual art. What visual poetry does that no other art does is communicate with both words and visual images *at the same time.*

4. Some. I compose more textual poetry than visual poetry because it's easier for me. And I write more prose than textual poetry because that's easiest for me.

5. I feel a kinship with *everyone* who has ever composed visual poetry (by *any* definition) – but then again, I feel a kinship with all artists of any kind. In visual poetry, though, my first hero was E.E. Cummings. Later certain works by Ron Johnson had a strong appeal for me – his "Io and the Moon" series in particular. I don't consider Aram Saroyan a visaul poet but love his alphaconceptual poems. His "lighght" might be my favorite artwork of any kind, and it *is* a visual poem (although also an alphaconceptual one, which makes it a compound pluraesthetic poem in my poetics). I also admire the work of Saul Steinberg. There are many other artists past and present whom I admire but, offhand, the contemporaries I feel closest to in visual poetry are Geof Huth, Karl Kempton, Jonathan Brannen and Crag Hill, for they seem the most lyrical, and lyricism is central to me. But other names important to me are Byrum, Curry, Hood, Helmes, Ernst, And, Was, Evason, Beining, Bennett (though I consider him primarily a textual poet), Martone . . . and I'm sure I'm forgetting *many* others.

   I *don't* feel any great kinship with anyone in the field, or considered to have been in the field, before Cummings, with the possible exception of Apollinaire. I much admire many foreign visual poets but have trouble remembering their names. Gomringer, of course. Many others of those in the Emmett Williams anthology . . .

6. Yes, though very informally. Many of the contemporaries I mentioned in the preceding answer and I publish one another's work and exchange letters. I have collaborated on artworks with Geof Huth, jwcurry, and Wharton Hood, too. My impression is that there are very few serious visual poets in this country (and Canada), and that I personally know most of them, and am familiar with the work of nearly all the rest. So I feel like I'm a member of a nation-wide community of visual poets. Furthermore, that community interacts energetically with visual poets overseas, so I have a sense of being international, too.

7. Apparently other visual poets only, though I aim my work at all people with cultural interests. My anti-audience seems to be teachers of literature, and knownstream editors, publishers and poets.

8. Otherstream publications, mail art shows and an occasional gallery showing are my only outlets as of early 1992.

9.a. Visual poetry is (in part) a development from traditional textual poetry, and can and has revived that by recycling it in new forms and/or providing material for it to play off of into new life.

9.b. Visual poetry makes available new expressive techniques for use in contemporary textual practice, but gets little out of the latter other than an occasional image – except in the case of contemporary "language poetry", which is supplying all poets with new ways of using syntax.

9.c. Visual poetry can, of course, be used as propaganda, but not effectively, since those susceptible to propaganda lack the intelligence to understand visual poetry. Visual poetry is thus only significant as art, and for that reason outside the socio-economic and/or political arena. It is certainly part of history and our current situation, though, and seems to me rather excitingly indicating the human race's return to wide-mindedness after centuries in which specialists have reigned supreme (and, to be fair, made the discoveries and created the structures that have made most of what we are now transcending their narrowness from possible). Visual poetry as the unacknowledged center of post-industrialism doesn't seem to me an entirely insane concept.

10. Visual poetry's sole values are esthetic. Consequently, "all" it can bring to the world of those who view/read it is beauty. Aside from truth, however, there is nothing else worth living for, so I consider visual poetry as important as anything else in the world.

11. My visual-poetry-related income is negative, even excluding my losses as a publisher of it. I've never gotten any kind of grant as a poet, but have one in hand as a publisher from Marvin Sackner (to co-publish with Score Publications an anthology of Austrian visual poetry).

12. I'm all for private grants, and against government interference, even in the form of subsidies. However, since government interference is universal and unavoidable, and since practicaly everything is subsidized by the government in one form or another, I suppose visual poets should have access to the trough, too.

COMMENTS: As I worked on answering this questionnaire, it struck me that maybe it should have come out only one or two questions at a time, over a period of several years. I've found myself unable to answer any of the questions as fully as I'd like to. Or without feeling incredibly pretentious. But I've found the process worthwhile, and am eager to see what others in the field have to say about these matters.

A Late Note on Visio-Textual Terminology

Although I continue to believe that to call a text without words "poetry" makes no more sense than calling a telephone number "mathematics", I decided after writing my COREsponse to give into my numerous Raving Enemies (and insufficiently unindifferent friends) on the question of the proper definition of "visual poetry". Consequently, I now withdraw (notify *Time* and *Newsweek*) my requirement that an artwork needs to have significant words in it to qualify as a proper visual poem.

I reached my decision for four reasons:

1. It's probably too late to rescue the term "visual poetry" from its currently widespread use to mean just about anything that contains both textual and visual matter.
2. A reverse putsch is just what I need to make me famous forever for taxonomical flexibility, and to stop the vicious remarks that Wharton Hood and Geof Huth have been making *to my face* about my fascistic tendencies.
3. I realized that I lacked a term for the full specturm of poetries and related text-involved experiments in visual art now being practiced, and that "visual poetry" could fill that lexicuum nicely if I were to overlook its appalling inappropriateness.
4. I thought of a term for the kind of specialized visio-textual art I'd been calling "visual poetry", and believed no other term could adequately denote, thereby allowing me to turn "visual poetry" back to the people.

My new term for GENUINE visual poetry is "Illumagistic Poetry". I don't expect this to catch on, but expect people to respect it as MY term for visual poetry whose visual component acts as a significant metaphor for its main verbal component. My name for visual poetry whose textual elements are visually important but form no significant words is "Textual Illumagery". "Illumagery" is my latest, and I hope last, coinage for "visual art". ("Illumages" are what visual artists, or "illumagists", create – i.e., collages, paintings, drawing, sculptures, photographs, and so forth; and the pronunciation of "illumagery" is ih LOO muhj ree.)

I now define "visual poetry" as any artwork which contains textual elements that are significantly meaningful in some linguistic way and which must be seen to be fully appreciated. It would thus include the kind of spelling-involved poetry I call "Alphaconceptual Poetry" (e.g. Jonathan Brannen's "bearth") as well as the kind of text-and-illumage combinations I've been calling "Illuscriptation" for some time (because they don't fit my definitions of illumagistic poetry or textual illumagery). As for what I call "visually-enhanced poetry" (e.g., conventional poems translated into calligraphy) and "textually-enhanced illumagery" (e.g., conventional paintings that contain letters or even words), I'll leave it up to others whether or not they should be considered "visual poetry".

ANA HATHERLY &
E. M. DE MELO E CASTRO

Our response to the questionnaire is conditioned by the following two aspects:

1. The PORTUGUESE EXPERIMENTAL POETRY Movement (here referred to as PO.EX), dates back to the early sixties. Having benefited, at the beginning, from a close contact with the Brasilian CONCRETE POETRY Movement, facilitated by the use of the same language, PO.EX soon became clearly differentiated. For this reason, the correct way to situate PO.EX is to place it among the pioneering European avant-garde movements of the second half of the century, which were to integrate the world-wide Visual Poetry trend. PO.EX had its high time during the sixties, when it became a real advanced-garde in visual/semantic research, clearly penetrating in the field of Semiotics, with a special interest in using non-verbal materials in poetry making.

2. In Portugal, the sixties were a contradictory decade: on the one hand, internally, we lived a dark period of censorship and fascist repression under Salazar's regime and the Colonial War in Africa; on the other, we were receiving the influx of new ideas and trends coming from world-wide movements such as Pop Art, Pop Music, Hippies, etc., together with the technological advances associated with democratic societies, open and polyvalent. All this coinciding with Structuralism, Semiotics, Marxist Revisionism, and the new outlook on discourse, text, etc., developing from new ideas in Linguistics and Sociology. Also in this respect PO.EX went beyond the Brasilian CONCRETE POETRY Movement. Besides becoming in Portugal an OPPOSER to the internal political situation, PO.EX became a means of introducing in the country new "dangerous" information. PO.EX Poets practiced a new "revolutionary" type of poetry which openly contradicted traditional, accepted ways. So, the Experimental Poetry activity, in Portugal and in the sixties and seventies, corresponds to a loud NO to the regime but also to Poetry ideologically conditioned and formally conventional, such as was dictated by Social Realism.

The PO.EX stand manifests itself, among other aspects, by the deconstruction of official discourse (both of Salazarists and Neo-Realists) and by a deep involvement with visual-semantic-morphological communication.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

1. Visual Poetry uses verbal signifiers – such as letters, phonemes, words, sentences – in non-verbal situations. Or it uses non-verbal signifiers in situations typical of verbal rhetoric. Both situations occur in PO.EX.

2. For us, Visual Poetry has always been open and polysemic, and for that reason full of possibilities of indeterminacy. We never tried to define Visual Poetry or to construct a closed theory. For us, Visual Poetry is an aspect, an angle, a way among others of creating Poetical Objects that are NEW, unexpected, transgressive. Significantly, in the sixties, Ana Hatherly wrote a poem around the theme of the Poet as "a calculator of improbabilities".

3. The so-called visual or plastic arts – painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, video – have a specific form of articulation between their signifiers and the signifieds they are able to communicate. Visual Poetry cannot be reduced to a verbal rhetoric when it uses non-verbal signifiers. And this is so because there are rhetorical means proper to painting,

sculpture, etc. which have nothing to do with the rhetoric of poetry. Nevertheless, hybrids are possible, such as Lettrist Painting, and more recently Video-Poetry, started in Portugal by E.M. de Melo e Castro in 1969 and now in full swing. Other manifestations of this are, for instance, the collages Ana Hatherly made from political posters which covered Lisbon walls immediately after the 1974 Revolution, and which were exhibited in London in 1978.

4. PO.EX production is not limited to Visual Poetry only. One of its main characteristics is precisly the fact that Experimental Poets are interested both in grammatical-morpho-semantic research, and in mathematical-combinatory exploration, with a view to an open and synesthetic communication.

5. -----

6. There never was a Portuguese Experimental Poetry Group as such, but several independent poets who, at a given moment and for different personal reasons, made poetry with experimental characteristics in the sense referred to above. But although there was not a proper group, there was, clearly, an experimental movement with leading figures, of which Melo e Castro, Antonio Aragão, Ana Hatherly, Salette Tavares, and others are representative members. The publication of a magazine called POESIA EXPERIMENTAL (in 1965 and again in 1967) was the central meeting point of these poets. Later, Melo e Castro and Ana Hatherly became the historians of the movement, having published in 1982 a volume in which were collected the main theoretical texts produced by PO.EX poets.

7. In Portugal, due to the reasons stated above, the Experimental Poets always felt that to have an audience was incompatible with the avant-garde nature of their research. The work of these poets was one of anticipating and creating the conditions for a type of communication which would take place in the future. The real audiences for such poets are never their contemporaries. Being now a historical movement, PO.EX has an audience of specialists and scholars, like any other literary phenomenon. In our country it is recognized as having been influential in the literary milieu, in advertising, and even in the colloquial Portuguese spoken today, where the effect of experimental treatment of the language is clearly distinguishable.

8. Experimental publications, gallery shows, and participation in international meetings, seminars, etc.

9.a. The relationship between Portuguese experimental poetry and the poetry of the seventeenth century Baroque period is now an accepted fact. But it was not so in the sixties and seventies. The establishment of this evidence is due to Ana Hatherly's research, and the contribution of Melo e Castro's literary criticism. The poetry of the Baroque period must be – and now is – considered as an ancestor of twentieth century experimental poetry, as demonstrated by Ana Hatherly in her book *A Experiencia do Prodigio* (Lisbon, 1983) and all her other publications on the subject. (For further reference see: Dick Higgins, *Pattern Poetry – Guide to an Unknown Literature*, State University of New York Press, 1987).

9.b. In our view, Visual Poetry is an alternative to the hypersubjectivism and decadence that invaded poetry in the seventies and eighties. Having great potentialities for communication, Visual Poetry can convey a constructive optimism clearly opposed to the metaphysical-decadent tendencies, typical of a certain post-modernism, which to us, heirs of baroque or neo-baroque tradition, seem devoid of interest.

9.c. Currently, experimental poetry finds a renewed justification in the opposition to the values – or non-values – of the new consumer's society jungle. In the same way as they did when opposing Fascism or Social Realism, experimental poets are now hypercritical of the economic model applied to all human activities.

10. Experimental-visual poetry research can utilize the technologies, not to enslave men, but to discover new forms, new ways of creativity and esthetic fruition.

11. 0%! (Zero percent!) In Portugal, poetry of any kind is a non-profit activity. The Experimental Poetry Movement was never subsidized by government or private grants.

12. By government grants – never. But could benefit from occasional private sponsorship.

Lisbon, March 24, 1992

DICK HIGGINS

1. They are intermedial.

2. I don't know. This is not the kind of thing that I consider.

3. The two areas are synergistic when the piece works – i.e., when visual and textual fuse without seams. When they merely mix, the result usually looks gimmicky.

4. There is a strong visual sensibility in all my poetry, but not all is "visual poetry" any more than Thomas Hardy's late lyrics, which also show a visual sensibility, can be described that way. It is a matter of degree if "visual poetry" is a meaningful label.

5. George Herbert, Simias of Rhodes, Theocritus, José Gonzáles, Estrada [sic], Gerhard Rühm, Franz Mon, Emmett Williams, Ian Hamilton Finlay, etc.

6. I used to but, alas, seldom have time for it anymore.

7. I don't know.

8. Gallery shows, museum shows, magazines, books, etc. I don't like the term "experimental" for art.

9. Don't know.

10. It should heighten our cultural and daily experience, both, should help the mind achieve serenity.

11. Virtually none.

12. Sure – like any other art. The problem is that if you do two or more arts, nobody takes responsibility for you. The panelists want it all to come out of somebody else's budget.

WHARTON HOOD

1. "Visual poetry", as opposed to other forms of poetry, is, in my definition, a type of language use "whose" primary syntactical devices are spatially rather than grammatically explicit.

2.a. The spatial syntaxes that I have used in my visual poetry depend entirely on what is called for in each specific instance, but I suppose the common requirement is to perceive all the linguistic elements and their relationships simultaneously instead of sequentially, unless sequentiality is made an obvious part of the process (by this I mean sequentiality as made explicit by the presence of words – the letters of which must be read in order as a prerequisite for knowing which word it is – or the division of space not only into two-dimensional panels but a succession of these panels, sort of skipping the third, or spatial dimension, and going directly to the fourth, or time, among other possibilities.

2.b. Not really.

3.a. See the answer to 2.a., and increase the range of possibilities exponentially according to how many people actually do the stuff, halving your answer to give the "benefit" of duplication of effort.

3.b. In other words, the question is too large for me to answer. I hope you sent a copy of the questionnaire to Marvin Sackner. He would be equipped to answer it.

4. Some.

5. d.a. levy, Bob Cobbing, John Curry, Julien Blaine, Kitasono Katué.

6.a. Minimally, but yes.

6.b. Mainly correspondence, the central few being Bob Grumman, David UU, Brian David Johnston, and Damian Lopes. Also in personal contact with a few people in Toronto, such as Curry, Peggy Lefler, and Daniel Bradley. I publish the occasional work (of my own and others') under the Utopic Furnace Press imprint, and wing some of my own stuff around for publication or discussion. Mainly, I talk.

7. Anyone who will listen, I guess. I have no idea who my audience is when others publish my work, but the primary audience is among the people I am in contact with in some way or another.

8. I seem to have a lot of luck with magazines, but prefer to have the stuff separately contextualized eventually. While I do write separate poems, often they are parts of groups or series that are nice to see as wholes. I have little experience with exhibitions, and those I have had have been unpleasant. Books and ephemera, then.

9. Perhaps this is cynical of me, but I do not see how visual poetry has much relevance, on a social scale, to much of anything besides having been corrupted by clothing manufacturers and advertising executives. It seems to matter to those who do the stuff and little beyond that.

10. I cannot speak for others, but I derive a large percentage of my entertainments from submitting myself to the perceptual engagements visual poetry requires. The natural

byproduct of this engagement is that I have come to be, in my opinion, a more perceptual person in general.

11.a. Probably not even one percent.

11.b. Probably about eighty percent. I have so far received two grants for writing from the Ontario Arts Council Writers' Reserve for a combined total of $2,500, some two years between grants and both recommendations from different sources.

12. Seeing some of the things that *do* get government funding, I do not see why visual poetry should be exempt from the privelege. Actually, I should note that only my first grant (of $1,500) was for visual poetry, but that it does get funding in Canada, at least through the Ontario Arts Council.

COMMENTS:

Despite the stuff I have said here, I do not consider myself a visual poet, nor even necessarily a poet, though I do make poems of various sorts. In this capacity, my views are truly peripheral, but hopefully interesting when collated along with all the other information you receive.

An interesting footnote is that the only academic (post-high school) training in any language arts I have had was a brief stint in journalism (at a college), which was so disgusting I got the hell out of there (it is one of the many professions where truth has little place, and insight and perception even less). Some of my work – particularly *Nejinski in Toronto* – is reaction to this, and certainly most of my work contains at least a slap in the face – if not an outright kick in the teeth – to academic considerations and inherited value judgments.

I do my stuff for personal entertainment purposes, and have been gratified to find others interested as well. There must, therefore, be something to the idea that poetry/literature is capable of "social change". Having an audience, no matter how tiny it is, has changed my social life/practices. Assuming continued causality . . .

GEOF HUTH

1. Visual poetry can be distinguished from other examples of poetry by its *reliance* on the visual aspect of the poem. This "visual aspect" can include the deformation of the letters in the poem, the arrangement of the words or letters of the poem into visual patterns, or the significant integration of a visual element (photograph, drawing, painting, photocopy) with poetic language. In some contexts, visual poetry has come to include some types of conceptual or minimalist poems, (such as pwoermds) that do not necessarily depend on visual effects but which appear to be classifiably "visual" because of their shockingly unusual visual dynamic (pwoermds, for example, as single words presented outside of any other context – that is *withtext*).

   The difficulty remains of distinguishing visual poetry from language art. This is the real quandary in differentiating between types of verbo-visual artforms. Visual poetry, as currently conceived and practiced, often eschews the use of even complete words, depends on the use of mere letterforms (or fragments of these), and exhibits a more significant visual (rather than verbal) impact. Given this situation, the question is whether we should use the term visual poetry at all, because what we are interested in is the intermedium between literature and visual art. Maybe, a more general term (possibly Grumman's *vizlature*) should be considered as a replacement that would simplify the problem of taxonomy while supporting the production of artworks all along the verbo-visual continuum.

2. Basically, the visual aspects of my own "visual poetry" work as talismanic or tokenistic devices to imbue the verbal element with increased significance or interest. I have worked, and continue to work, as a visual poet from the point of view of a writer. I write towards the visual, discovering it in the writing process. Sometimes, I sketch with stencils or rulers, drawing letters to examine their hidden significance, expanding the verbal pun into the deeper, more unresolvable visual pun. Many of my verbo-visual works are minimalistic (some depending on puns at the level of a single letter), but other pieces are more significant from a literary point of view.

3. Some of my works (those which are more calligraphic or pattern poetic) include substantial expanses of syntactically arranged words, occasionally including even shaped prose. The visual aspect of these works is important, but not as important as in some of my briefer works. In only one instance ("The Dreams of the Fishwife" [*Xerolage #17*]), do I think the verbal and the visual aspect of the poems I've written are completely interpenetrated, forming pieces wholly visual *and* wholly verbal. That may be the true goal of visual poetry, but we cannot expect that this should be its only purpose. For such one-mindedness would destroy our whole enterprise.

4. Of course, all my poetry is not visual. Some is conceptual, some aural, some language, and some (including some of my best work) is more mainstream and verbal, relying less on visual mannerisms. I think that to be a true intermediast I would have to be a writer as well as a visual artist, and I see no conflict in writing different types of work. I consider myself (generally) a wordist: one interested in words and in using these in artisitc ways to provide ideas (meaning) and pleasure (sound and visual aspects).

5. I probably feel the most kinship with Eugen Gomringer in my visual poetry – strange as this may sound nowadays. I've always enjoyed the cleanness, the clarity of his work, its simplicity. Although that wouldn't be enough for me nowadays, I still do enjoy that. Otherwise, I feel little kinship to anyone. I appreciate much of the work I see nowadays

and substantially enjoy a good deal as well, but I'm not aware (because, of course, I don't pay attention to it) of the connections between my work and that of others. I don't have a single style (or even a congeries of interrelated styles) as some do (Karl Kempton is an obvious example), so maybe I don't clearly see the relationship of my poems to themselves, and I haven't even started comparing myself to others.

6. The only ways I participate in a community of visual poets are through the mail, and in magazines that publish visual poetry. I've met only a few visual poets in my life (Miekal And, Jonathan Brannen, jwcurry, Peggy Lefler, and Liz Was), and I've spoken to only one more (Bob Grumman) on the telephone. There are few concentrations of visual poets on this continent, and I don't live near any of those places. I feel like the preternatural American artist – isolated from any community of like-minded people, living in the creamy soup of the middle class where most of us were born.

7. I have always worried about the audience for poetry in general. And with visual poetry, the situation is even worse. I know a few people who read poetry for entertainment but who don't actually write poetry. However, I can only think of two people who read (or approceive) visual poetry without being practitioners: Ruth & Marvin Sackner (& Marvin did cooperate in the production of at least one visual poem postcard). So the audience for visual poetry is visual poets. We have even few critics of this type of art.

8. Subgroundlevel publications are the primary forums for my visual poetic works. This is, of course, the easiest manner in which to get work out in front of somebody. It is more difficult to get someone to publish a book of one's work. And exhibits are infrequent and less important for someone like me, whose sensibilities are more literary than otherwise.

9. I see no necessary relevance of visual poetry to contemporary political situations. It is merely art, and may or may not have any intended political meanings. In a sociological context, visual poetry is interesting: the general public (or that small percentage who are aware of visual poetry) generally see such poetry as a subtle way in which avant-garde artists undermine social structures. Since it is one of the little-understood arts, it wins the respect of few and the suspicion of many. Virtually all of those professors of English I have known (and I've known many) view visual literature as a waste of time – not worth the time it takes to make it, and less worth the time for critical examination. Visual literature commands just about the same level of respect as contemporary romance novels.

   Historically, as we all know, visual poetry has a long tradition, although that tradition has often been forgotten and has only in the past couple of decades been truly rediscovered. Visual poetry remains, however, at the margins of literary endeavor. Where it exists in the visual arts, it fares slightly better because the visual arts are less conservative than belles-lettres in this country. More importantly, however, the verbal element in the works can easily be ignored by approceivers of visual art; in literary circles, it is impossible to ignore the visual aspect of these intermedial works. It may be possible that the disregard for visual literature *may* be overcome by the work of sensitive and intelligent critics, such as David W. Seaman and Willard Bohn.

10. Visual poetry, as art, brings pleasure to the world – pleasure different from that possible through other artforms. See Ian Hamilton Finlay's explanation for why he made concrete poems.

11. None of my income is derived from my work as a visual poet, and I imagine that is the case with the overwhelming majority of us.

12. I don't care if visual poetry is subsidized by grants or not. We shouldn't expect society at large to have any concern for our interests; and since we know they don't, we shouldn't expect them to pay for them. I like to think that artists can make their art without the help of patronage. Of course, that will mean that we will necessarily accomplish less (because we have less time to accomplish anything), but we will also owe our allegiance to no one.

COMMENTS:

My remarks herein seem particularly personal, but that's because I have tried to answer the questions as they were asked. I hope this is sufficient.

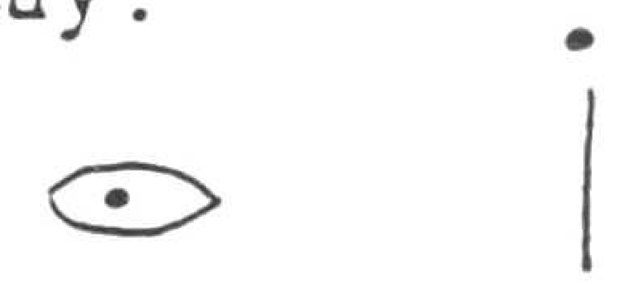
ANNIE I.

1. What qualities or characteristics distinguish 'visual poetry' from other poetic productions?

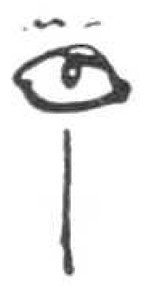
poetry: I   visual poetry: İ

(Thanks puloin biloid)

2. How do the 'visual' or 'graphic' elements in your work come to be 'read' as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers? Do you notice any contradictions, gaps, etc., which you must bridge in order to think the notion 'visual poetry'?



3. How do the kinds of meaning communicated by language occur/inhere in visual poetry, and, how do the kinds of meaning communicated in visual art occur in visual poetry? In other words, in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?



4. Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'?

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5. Which particular works or creators of visual poetry do you feel a kinship with in your own work?

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6. Do you participate in a community (or communities) of visual poets? If so, who and how?

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7. Who is your audience?

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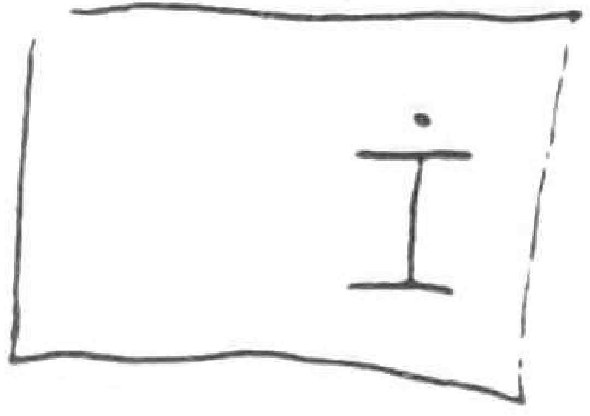
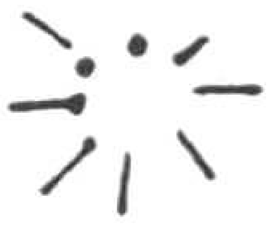
8. What do you think are the primary forums for your work? (For example, literary magazines, experimental publications, gallery shows, etc.)



9. What do you judge to be the relevance of visual poetry to:
   a. prior (historical) poetic practice
   b. contemporary poetic practice
   c. contemporary socio-economic and/or political situations?

   In other words, how does visual poetry relate to your sense of our 'historic' and 'current situation'?



10. What values or benefits does/could/should visual poetry have in relation to our current situation? What does it bring to the world of those who view/read it?

¡ → !

11. What percentage of your income is derived from your visual poetry work (including teaching, critical writing, etc.)? What percentage of that income is derived from government or private (i.e. corporate or foundation) grants?

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12. Do you think visual poetry should be subsidized by government and/or private grants?

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COMMENTS:

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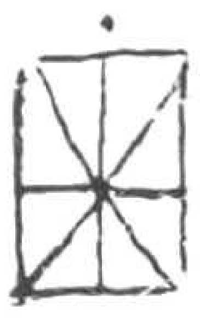

EDUARDO KAC

1. Visual poems communicate on two levels simultaneously: verbal and visual. Linear poems are alienated from the materiality of the printed media in which they appear, i.e., magazines or books. Visual poems explore the very structure of their medium: the page, the succession of pages, the typeface, physical cuts on the page, the size of the book, etc. Visual poems also go beyond the book or magazine format, requiring new ways of perceiving, reading and understanding poetry.

2. All my poems since 1983 have been written holographically. In my holopoems, words are seen/read according to the relative position and movement of the viewer/reader. As perceived in a "fluctuating field", words are linked by the viewer in the order perceived to produce different associations or meanings.

3. The visual features of written language are communication factors which are usually ignored in ordinary writing. In experimental poetry, they are a fundamental aesthetic element.

4. Since 1983 I have been concentrating my efforts on developing a syntax for visual poetry that investigates and explores holographic space, and more recently, synthetic (or computer-generated) holographic space. All of my holograms are visual poems: holopoems.

5. Appolinaire, cummings, Kamiensky, Belloli.

6. No.

7. Museum and gallery visitors, primarily.

8. Due to the extremely high cost involved in mass-producing holograms, it is not possible for me, at this point, to have my holopoems printed in large runs. I produced a limited edition of one hundred copies of my holopoem "Amalgam" (1990), which was included in the first one hundred copies of the catalogue of my one-man show "Holopoetry 1983-1990", held at the Museum of Holography in New York, in April, 1990.

9. I believe visual poetry is important because it emphasizes aesthetic elements that are fundamental in contemporary visual culture but which are ordinarily perceived as irrelevant to literature. Poetry should not be alienated from the highly visual environment we live in. Visual poetry questions linear syntax and linear thinking, exhibiting the arbitrary nature of language. Literature, including poetry, is written to be *printed.* The components of the printed verbal sign are manipulated by visual poets to expand the signifying process.

10. A good visual poem is not better than a good linear poem. It is simply different. Visual poems open a new dimension to literature by breaking with the rigidity that separates poetry from the visual arts.

11. I would say that, indirectly, 100%. But directly, maybe 10 or 20%. It varies.

12. It would be a major contribution to the field if specific funding was offered to visual poetry. All the grants available for poetry require the "manuscript" to have a certain amount of "pages", or "lines of verse" – compositional units that many visual poets, including myself, don't use anymore. Federal and private funding should be offered to visual poetry, and not only to *printed* visual poetry; the development of new poetic forms (videopoetry, computer poetry, holographic poetry etc.) should be encouraged.

BILL KEITH

1. Firstly, I think of myself as a polyartist (a term coined by critic/writer/poet/filmaker Richard Kostelanetz) or experimental poet. By polyartist I take it that Kostelanetz means an artist actively engaged in three or more disciplines. Equally rewarding is an investigation of the term "intermedia" put forward by Dick Higgins, critic/poet/publisher/musician. Higgins, in his book *Horizons*, defines "intermedia" as:

> "when two or more discrete media are conceptually fused, they become intermedia. "Intermedia" differs from mixed media (q.v.) in being inseparable in the essence of an artwork."

But do not confuse intermedia with mixed media; Higgins defines mixed media as:

> "the presence in a work of two or more discrete media without their being conceptually fused. An example is the opera, in which there are music, visual art, and a literary text, but one always knows which is which. In this way mixed media differs from intermedia."

Succinct, rational, and to the point. Allow me one final quotation from Dick Higgins:

> "visual poetry: poetry in which the visual element predominates. The best-known genre of visual poetry is concrete poetry, modern poems using the letters of the alphabet in a visual way. But it also includes many other genres, such as poems using photographs, or semiotic signs."

In Richard Kostelanetz's essay, "An ABC of ContempoReading", in his book *Esthetics Contemporary*, he writes:

> "In literature, out of the melding of language with design came what is called *visual poetry* or *word-imagery*, where the enhancing coherence of words is pictorial (rather than syntactical), while *sound poetry* comes from integrating musical values with initially verbal material. Since the possibilities of literary intermedia have scarcely been explored, it is reasonable to suspect that this may be the single greatest esthetic idea for our time – the sole contemporary peer of cubism and collage."

Now, being a painter/photographer/poet myself, I felt that these two great and under-appreciated critics had definitively articulated the genre and drawn up the battleground. Visuality . . . is inherent in all languages – or should I say all *written* languages.

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KARL KEMPTON

1. What qualities or characteristics distinguish 'visual poetry' from other poetic productions?

countless and vague are the definitions of the term 'poem'. while i do not necessarily agree with the following definition, it is one i have found useful to begin with:

> The art which uses words as both speech and song, and, more rarely, *as typographical patterns* (my italics), to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feelings salute, the mind perceives, and the shaping imagination orders.[1]

if this is acceptable, the tradition of the visual poem is part of and not separate from what has come to be called 'the poem' in our culture. the debate shifts then to the concept of *typographical pattern* and more generally of *pattern*. a thorough analysis of the history and development of these two areas as they relate to poetics continues to be ignored in the so-called main stream of critical thinking and acceptance in the u.s. and most other european centric precincts as well as japan.

a more straight forward response to this question is that the 'visual' poem contains within it an element or elements that must be *seen* with the eyes in order to be fully experienced. the experience may come by way of feeling and/or intuiting and/or sensing and/or thinking. the visual image for the eye may or may partially consist of language, the parts of language or its fragments. if not made up of specifically recognizable language symbols or signifiers, a gesture or hint of the literary is present to distinguish the poem from a purely visual art work, such as the concept of the 'poetic line' or the 'mapping' of a poetic form.

in a manner of speaking our species is much like a species of fish surrounded by water that it accepts without conscious thought; for us it is an ocean of language. like the painter who uses paints for expression, or the sculptor who uses stone, metal, wood, earth, etc., or the musician who uses sound, the visual poet uses the stuff of language to compose with — word, text, note, code, petroglyph, font, phonic character, rock graphic, type, cipher, symbol, pictograph, sentence, number, hieroglyph, rhythm, iconograph, grammar, cluster, stroke, ideogram, density, pattern, diagram, logogram, poetic terminology and their visual possibilities and implications (accent, line, color, measure, . . .), etc. with which to create a multiple array of possibilities to wed with other art forms.

in general the above quoted definition remains on the periphery. without much thought in our current era, 'poetry' is considered solely an auditory based form of literary expression that can be *heard* to be experienced, not *seen*. the poem on the page acts as a 'textual score', a series of phonetic symbols representing the auditory. in the use of our language, these symbols most commonly are arranged left to right in order to be read. it is indeed an unfortunate set of circumstances surrounding the visual poet that (1) most of the general public consider a 'poem' to be a literary form that must rhyme and (2) most academic poets and critics along with street poets and critics deny the visual forms and possibilities of poetics.

some may argue that the 'modern' poem and the ensuing contemporary forms that use the page as a 'field'[2] for composition may also qualify as candidates for the visual poem. this is an example of the problem of definition and the gray area between classifications. however, i think few visual poets would agree that only line placement and spacing on a page qualifies a poem as visual; rather it is just 'scoring' the reading. a visual poem is in its entirety the whole image; the image being more than a sum of its parts. kin to an ideogram or sign, or code, or glyph, etc..

a twentieth century visual poem could be said to be the contemporary version of the historical form known as the pattern or shaped poem. though here too these terms are vague and in need of extensive analysis. the characteristic patterns of pre-1900 were extensive in numbers of language families, types, functions, and intentions, many of which remain in use to this moment[3]. as well as expanding the accepted parameters of language and creating new language densities and clusters, the post 1900 visual poets married their new forms and types to other visual arts. and do not forget that all the arts were undergoing their own rapid changes. generally, perhaps the most significant difference between the pre- and post-1900 works is that the former works were composed with clarity and symmetry, while the works of the later period consist of vast numbers of asymmetrical and unclear (strike-over or layers of language). this conscious and unconscious blurring, chaos within the work alongside the other new arts reflect(ed) to a considerable extent the global environmental and psychological crisis of that moment as well as forecasting the deeper crisis of this moment.

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[1] Babette Deutsch, POETRY HANDBOOK: A DICTIONARY OF TERMS. Fourth Edition, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, NY, 1990.

[2] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse", The HUMAN UNIVERSE AND OTHER ESSAYS., Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1967

in our european centric culture the term 'poem' (from greek, to make) has replaced all the other terms from the non-urban, tribal european hunting and gathering and agricultural traditions. this has resulted in the loss of the magical roots and the entire pre-urban paradigm of old europe. an example is the term 'rune' that contains within it the roots of magic, spell, charm, amulet, and song.

the poem is written with phonetic symbols that have been evolving for nearly 4000 years (the accepted partial and patriarchal orthodox story). the materials upon which these have been written have also been evolving over this same period of time, nearly all of which represent or are flat, page-like surfaces[4]. though the post 1900 visual poem is found most often on the same surfaces and materials as the 'traditionally' accepted concept of the poem, the surfaces and forms of the 3 and sometimes 4 dimensional arts are frequently appropriated by visual poets as part of the ongoing merging or fusion with all of the other arts.
this may indicate that the poem and literature are returning to the larger and less narrowly defined contemporary fields of expression from which they originally sprang. with the newly emerging video and graphic technologies, with the global culture tied with communication networks, the speed of this development will most probably quicken.

perhaps a more appropriate question may have been to request a definition of visual poetry accompanied with a list of types of visual poetry. such a beginning would provide an adequate framework or reference point for those reading for the first time about this type, this literary and visual art blending, borderblur, intermedia[5], and/or rediscovery within the european centric culture complex[6]. furthermore, the above question may not seem as simply answerable should one include the entire scope of human literary and artistic expression, not just implying the short period of the writing and the much shorter period of typesetting.

unfortunately, too many of today's visual poets repeat what has been earlier assumed to be the historical roots of visual poetry — egyptian hieroglyphs, greek pattern poems, or equally young writing systems. others pointing further back to rock art as a root source have not probed deeply or widely in the types, forms, and systems of which they are a part. this unfortunate repetition is not based on research but quoting others who in turn are quoting — much like the problem of the misrepresentation of the new moon by 98 percent of modern era european centric bound artists who, copying each other rather than looking at the actual object, produce the old moon as the new moon.

all poetry and literature, it seems, regardless of language family, originated within an oral tradition. the possible ages of the multitude of the various existent and extinct unwritten literatures remains a matter of debate. it is also quite possible that homo sapien is not the only humanoid with an oral literature (see question 9).

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[3] Dick Higgins, PATTERN POETRY: GUIDE TO AN UNKNOWN LITERATURE. State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY., 12246. 1987.

[4] David Diringer, THE BOOK BEFORE PRINTING, ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND ORIENTAL. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, NY. 1983.

[5] Dick Higgins, A DIALECTIC OF CENTURIES: Notes Towards a Theory of the New Arts. Printed Matter, New York, NY. 1978.

[6] Karl Kempton, "visual poetry:definitions, context and problem of types", INNOVATIONS I, David Detrich, ed. Innovations Press, 7076 Dunn's Farm Rd., Maple City, MI 49664. 1991.

until the time of painted or pecked, or sculpt, or written symbolic representation on rock and other materials, all these literatures — spiritual, cosmological, mythological, sacred, and/or socio-communal — were memorized auditory (and inner voiced) expressions. most probably they were associated with the language of the body, of vibrational gymnastics, of gesture, of dramatic spatial presentation, and of communal dance when chanted or sung. further, our commonly accepted categories, our contemporary paradigm, did not begin to jell until 800 years ago. thus, what we call mythology, cosmology, calendar or day and year count, astronomy, geometry, measuring systems, alphabets, etc., were all interwoven and part of the poetic and symbolic systems of the pre-christian cultures and traditional ways[7]. many of the surviving systems in their various parts probably can be traced deep into the paleolithic.

when the surviving traditions moved *onto* text, two-dimensional planed text surface presentation, the 'visual' and 'auditory' aspects — that created vibrational fields originally intertwined with multidimensional presentation which in turn may have induced altered states of consciousness — disappeared as literatures evolved into the 'purer' phonetic symbolic systems. once this became a significant or dominant form by which literature of one generation was passed to the next, the spoken or performed work became 'text' and the living oral tradition was lost. in the languages where hieroglyphs, ideograms and logograms remained in use, considerably less of the visual and verbal 'materials' were jettisoned.

for us the 'text' became more or less a score for the auditory or verbal expression. this is the current and primary basis by which we now automatically assume when one states the term 'poem' or 'literature' unless one steadfastly maintains a wider historical scope as well as maintains a sensitivity to the 'traditional' cultures of the world, surviving or extinct.

2. How do the 'visual' or graphic elements in your work come to be 'read' as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers? Do you notice any contradictions, gaps, etc., which you must bridge in order to think the notion 'visual poetry'?

for me the choice of words here is rather confusing. i do not know how most of those who have seen, published, rejected or displayed my works view and/or read my poems with graphic elements "as 'poetic', i.e. 'literary' signifiers". nor am i fully versed in the specific details and historical scope of their knowledge. i can only discuss my field of experience and what i have come to accept as my tradition. there is a vast world wide heritage of visual and graphic elements belonging to the tradition of the visual poem from prehistory to the present moment. to date, i am not satisfied with my acquaintance or studies of this tradition (note above answer to #1 and see responses to 3 and 9).

perhaps the real problem facing visual poets is that most academics, publishers, editors and reader/viewers lack a sufficient introduction to the older global history of visual poetry and its various roots, the recent past (post 1900 for europe and post 1913 for the u.s.), and the contemporary history (tricky dating here in that some of our peers are 70 to 80 years of age, though i'll suggest from post world war 2 to the present). add to this that many of our peers and most of the potential readers/viewers also lack an understanding not only of the european centric visual literary history — alphabets, calligraphy, pattern poems, illuminated manuscripts, symbolic representation, etc. — but even worse lack an understanding of these and other aspects in the wider current, recent, historical and prehistorical global traditions. without knowledge of or at least an acquaintance with this context, it is indeed difficult to easily move into the realm of dual or multi-literacy, the poetic and visual literacy, of this expression and be able to accept graphic elements as 'poetic' and 'literary signifiers'.

i have no problems or contradictions, gaps, etc., or bridges to cross in order to think the notion 'visual poetry'. the problem that i and other visual poets have constantly been faced with is an uninformed reader/viewership. and, I think that some of this can be said to be due to a lack of an educated group of academic and non-academic critics and theorists, especially in this country. in my opinion, the reason for this void is that this form of expression pulls into it literacies, knowledge, gestures, and winks from the total human verbal and visual experience which, then, requires individuals who are not specialists. this does require a wide foundation in our current and historical and prehistorical global cultural intellectual complex from specialists unaccustomed to using both spheres of the brain simultaneously.

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[7] Robert Graves, THE WHITE GODDESS, A HISTORICAL GRAMMAR OF POETIC MYTH. The Noonday Press, New York, NY. 1974.

3. How do the kinds of meaning communicated by language occur/inhere in visual poetry, and, how do the kinds of meaning communicated in visual art occur in visual poetry? In other words, in what ways, by what methods, does the intersection of the literary and the visual occur in contemporary visual poetry?

i view this as a task for an entire book or a significant portion of one devoted to the history and development of visual poetry to this moment. one might first thoroughly identify, not assume, what is meant by "kinds of meaning communicated by language" and define 'language'. though not commonly assumed as language, an extremely wide number exist and are available for use by visual poets as resource materials.

the next section may be the identification of the vast array of methods and types that occur not only in the literary fields but all fields associated with written and symbolic communication. perhaps needing to be answered is the question what is written communication? this could be followed with the identification of the visual art fields and a classification of all the associated methods.

following this introduction could be a detailed, world wide prehistorical and historical presentation of the various roots of contemporary visual poetry. then, to answer with specificity, one should present a detailed analysis of each visual poet in order to see where and if her or his work fits into the preceding framework.

4. Do you consider some, most, or all of your poetic productions as 'visual poetry'?

i feel that that each work, poem or visual poem, rests upon all of one's preceding work(s).

5. Which particular works or creators of visual poetry do you feel a kinship with in your own work?

perhaps the individual i felt closest to and moved the most by when first teaching myself about visual poetry was the japanese concrete poet seiichi niikuni. the anthology by emmett williams was my first formal introduction to visual poetry[8]. while stationed in stuttgart, germany, in 1965-66, i came across concrete work displayed at a place called club voltaire, which at the time neither the significance of the work (perhaps that of hans myers) nor the club name meant anything to me. niikuni's *river/sand-bank* and *rain* within the anthology were works that remain with me as esthetic models. i first saw them in 1971 at the university of utah library; i had returned to graduate school to work on a masters degree in economic history with an emphasis on middle eastern studies.

during these graduate school days i found myself drawn to islamic calligraphy, a visual literary form i still regard with the highest respect, both the historical and the contemporary work. after dropping out of graduate school and while experimenting with my first novice visual poem efforts, i became enamored and remain so with keltic illuminated manuscripts, especially *the book of kells.*

from that point onward, i have been researching and studying the visual literature traditions from around the world and what i feel closeness to are rock art; the old european symbols[9]; symbolic and graphic systems of the southwest native american indians; the global surviving examples of amulets; the yantras and mandalas of the hindu traditions; and symbolic communication systems — hieroglyphs, lographs, ideograms, and the shapes, patterns, and development of the more 'pure' phonetic symbol systems that are assumed to have been stripped of visual symbolic information; and much more. this is a short list.

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[8] Emmett Williams, AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETE POETRY. Something Else Press, New York, NY. 1967.

[9] Marija Gimbutas, THE LANGUAGE OF THE GODDESS. , Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022. 1989.

Milton McMchesney, THE SIGNS OF THE VINCA CULTURE. University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA. 1973.

there is a large number of 20th century visual poets, past and peers, with whom i feel kinship. the americans among them are cummings and patchen whose work impacted me. i literally mean this, their work or some of it moved into me. if there is no visceral experience from a work or individual, there can be no influence, positive or negative on and/in me. and do not forget that negative response can be as vital and subtle and important as the positive.

there are also the works by the italian and russian futurists and the dadaists. the film *orpheus* by cocteau is of great significance. there is also a substantial list of artists whose work has greatly influenced me. among them are kandinsky, arp, vasarely and escher. i am also greatly influenced by patterns and forms found in the the non-human world, the 'natural' civilized world, the non-jungle of man.

many works i am drawn to suggest and inform that the visual poet, if young to the field has a potential, or if not young to the field, has reached a journeywo/man or master level of expression. but as to kinship, that is indeed another matter. that the presence of a work is deliberate, lyrical, and skillful, that it has a lasting, timelessness nature, that it has clear and crisp presentation, that it contains or suggests many levels, that it gives, nourishes the inner regions of my being, and that there is a knowing harmony directly or indirectly related to the *mystery* of which we are all a part, are some of the characteristics that i can verbalize and identify with[10]. or to sum it up in the title of a native american indian song, 'the beauty way'. there is also a number of other characteristics i am unable to verbalize because of the realms transcending the verbal that visual poets express.

over the years as the editor and publisher of *kaldron*[11], i have published works i feel very close to as well as work that i did not necessarily agree with or feel close to but at the same time considered important in context of the wider tradition. with that said, here is a partial list of contemporaries, with whom i feel varying degrees of kinship — fernando aguiar (portugal), david arnold (usa), patty arnold (usa), ana aly (brasil), miekal and (usa), avelino de araujo (brasil), vittore baroni (italy), kum nam baik (korea), jonathan brannen, (usa), hart broudy (canada), ernst buchwalder (switzerland), agusto de campos (brasil), haroldo de campos (brasil), paula claire (england), bob cobbing (england), david cole (usa), doris cross (usa), jw curry (canada), john-paul curtay (france), guillermo deisler (germany), wally depew (usa), klaus peter dencker (germany), bill dimichele (usa), kathy ernst (usa), loris essary (usa), greg evason (canada), bartolome ferrando, (spain), peter finch (wales), ian hamilton finaly (scotland), aaron flores (mexico), giovani fontana (italy),william fox, (usa), john furnival (england), philip gallo (usa), ilse garnier (france), pierre garnier (france), bob grumman (usa), scott helmes (usa), dick higgins (usa), dom sylvester houedard (england), wharton hood (canada), noboru izumi (japan), ronald johnson (usa), r. k. joshi (india), hiroo kamimura (japan), billKeith (usa), ruth kempton (usa), judy kleinberg (usa), rachid koraichi (tunisia), richard kostelantez, (usa), jiti kolar (czechoslovakia), peggy lelfer (canada),d.a. levy (usa), aaron marcos (usa), steve mccaffery (canada), stephen-paul martin (usa), john mantone (usa), hassan massoudy (france), hans mayer (germany), peter mayer (england), philadelpho menezes (brasil), ikuo mori (japan), bp nichol (canada), tom phillips (england), r. prost (usa), ruth wolf-reheldt (germany) john riddell (canada), marilyn r. rosenberg (usa), diter rot (germany), roland sabatier (france), abilio-jose santos, (portugal), alain satie (france), r. saunders (usa), carol stetser (usa), toshihiko shimizu (japan), pete spence (australia), shohachiro takahashi (japan), hiroshi tanabu (japan), miroljub todorovic (yugoslavia), davidd uu, (canada), paul de vree (netherlands), elizabeth was (usa), chuck welch (usa), larry wendt (usa), emmett williams (usa), michael winkler (usa), madam x (usa), constantin xenakis (france), ryojiro yamanaka (japan), shoji yoshizawa (japan), d.r. wagner (usa), and karl young (usa), and hossein zenderoudi (france).

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[10] Karl Kempton, "blue-violet shift", SCORE REVIEW 3, Crag Hill, ed.. Oakland, CA.

[11] Karl Kempton, editor, KALDRON, An International Journal of Visual Poetry and Language Art., Nos. 8-21/22. P.O. Box 7164, Halcyon, CA 93421-7164. 1978-1991.

6. Do you participate in a community (or communities) of visual poets? If so, who and how?

if you mean do i belong to a specific group of visual poets with a specific manifestoed framework, or a group of visual poets i rub shoulders with, look into their eyes, etc., the answer is no. community to me consists of physical and personal interaction with a group of individuals.

a thriving community of non-visual poets and artists exists in this county. i regularly participate in readings and occasionally promote events. i am the creator, co-founder and co-director of the *san luis obispo poetry festival* that will be nine years old this summer of 1992. i am also the co-founder of the monthly poetry series, *corners of the mouth*; though no longer directly involved in organizing the readings. the series began in 1984 and remains the primary reading platform in the central coast region of california and may now be the oldest ongoing monthly series between los angeles and san francico.

7. Who is your audience?

the function or role of an audience has its arguable positive merits as a specific target as well as an equally arguable problem of distraction from one's own purpose and intent by playing to or for an audience. i take the role of my own artistic expression as part of the process of inner growth, that of coming to terms with the knowns and unknowns of the mystery we all are immersed in and penetrated by. the work, then, is, i hope, an expression of self knowledge and awareness along the path where one comes face to face with the mystery. if the work gains acceptance because of or in spite of this inner alchemical, hermetic process, it is a side benefit, a gift, not the end itself.

within this context, then, i do not know exactly who my audience is. it is in part made up of other visual poets, editors, publishers and exhibition organizers and curators who seem to appreciate my work. then there would be the individuals exposed to my work through the efforts of the first group and of this second portion i know very little.

8. What do you think are the primary forums for your work? (For example, literary magazines, experimental publications, gallery shows, etc.)

books, broadsides, literary magazines, experimental publications, and gallery shows, individual and group.

9. What do you judge to be the relevance of visual poetry to:

a. prior (historical) poetic practice
b. contemporary poetic practice
c. contemporary socioeconomic and/or political situations?

In other words, how does visual poetry relate to your sense of our 'historic' and 'current situation'?

the answer seems to be a topic for either a book itself or an addition to the hypothetical book suggested in response to question 3. the answer also depends upon how or if to play with the possibilities these categories can imply. for example, i find interesting and curious the choice of the term 'practice' rather than 'traditions' or 'accomplishments' or 'works' or 'compositions' or 'forms', etc.. when the term 'historical' is used, does this refer merely to the european centric visual poetry roots and traditions? how and why did they evolve or dissolve in parallel alongside other political-social-economic-religious-spiritual-sacred-artistic... traditions and institutions? how and why did its entire cultural complex of concerns slowly focus upon and become obsessed with material manipulation and exploitation to create and hoard (much like the feared mythological european dragons) 'objects' to satisfy only the ego sector of awareness? and why and how does this insatiable appetite for exterior objects reflect an inner life of vast and unfulfilled emptiness?

i'll present an outline and only a partial answer due to space considerations. one first should cover the roots, the wide and varied traditions of previous visual poetics. if i am correct that the historical or the 4000 to 5000 year old roots of visual poetry are found in the development of the amulet, a spiritual-mystic-magic-religious physical representation of chant, prayer, mantra (a silently repeated verbal meditation focus symbol or phrase), or spell[12]. these verbal repetitions create verbal harmonic fields that can induce altered or non-ordinary states of awareness or consciousness. they, then, became auditory and/or vibrational fields visually represented as patterns on amulets and later their kindred yantras, mandalas, sacred calligraphy, and sacred illuminated manuscript pages[13]. of course, this means the roots are of a spiritual, mythological, sacred, cosmological and religious origin, though this is not a surprising statement when one considers that all the ancient arts were born along these pathways.

one, in my opinion, should investigate these developments of visual language representation in time and place of the various language and cultural groupings that make cohesive geographical-economic-political-social-historical sense. (a beginning for the contemporary spanish and portugese speaking visual poets has been made by cesar espinosa[14].) the next step would be an understanding of how these various groups interacted in order to determine whether or not visual poetics were transmissions from without or an independent tradition. one must understand as fully as possible how the visual sense of language contributed not only to poetics but how the culture complex in general held and nourished poetics and the visual in language.

for example, the spiritual and non-spiritual significance of calligraphy, its history and ranking in non-greek orthodox european centric culture compared with the islamic, hindu, buddhist, taoist, and zen cultures and traditions is of primary importance to the understanding of poetics and visual and pattern poems[15].

the role of poetry in our european centric culture has its particular history of development. what this role is and has been outside our complex is far different over the last 2000 years; many cultures and traditions still hold the word within the precincts of the sacred.

due to the vast destruction of libraries in mesoamerica, the full sense of visualness in language and poetics can never be fully understood[16]. the only area remaining for a thorough investigation of the visual in the mesoamerican languages is that of huge cultural investment in the three dimensional representation of language and the relationship to the cosmology and mythology and how it influenced poetry[17].

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[12] Cyrus Lawrence Day, QUIPUS AND WITCHES' KNOTS. University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, KS. 1967.

[13] Ajit Mookerjee, YOGA ART. New York graphic Society, New York, NY. 1975.
Nik Douglas, TIBETAN TANTRIC CHARMS & AMULETS. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, NY. 1978.
Madhu Khanna, YANTRA, THE TANTRIC SYMBOL OF COSMIC UNITY. Thames and Hudson, London, England. 1979.
Pierre Rambach, THE SECRET MESSAGE OF TANTRIC BUDDHISM. Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York, NY. 1979.
John Stevens, SACRED CALLIGRAPHY OF THE EAST. Shambala Publications, Inc., Boulder CO. 1981.

[14] Cesar Espinosa, ed., CORROSSIVE SIGNS, Essays on Experimental Poetry (Visual, Concrete, Alternative), Trans., Harry Polkinhorn. Maisonneuve Press, PO Box 2980, Washington DC 20013-2980. 1990.

[15] Françoise Henry, THE BOOK OF KELLS. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY. 1974.
Abdelkebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, THE SPLENDOR OF ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York, NY. 1976.
Carl Nordenfalk, CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON PAINTING. George Braziller, New York, NY. 1977.
Martin Lings, THE QURANIC ART OF CALLIGRAPHY AND ILLUMINATION. Shambala Publications, Inc., Boulder CO. 1978.
Hassan Massoudy, CALLIGRAPHIE ARABE VIVANTE. Flammarion, Paris, France. 1981.
Ibid., John Stevens.
Yousif Mahmud Ghulam, Dr., THE ART OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY. (self published) P.O. Box 853, Lafayette, CA. 1982.
Marc Drogin, MEDIEVAL CALLIGRAPHY, ITS HISTORY AND TECHNIQUE. Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola, NY. 1989.
Janet Backhouse, THE LINOISFARNE GOSPELS. Phaidon Press, Ltd., Oxford, England. 1990.

[16] Karl Young, ONLY AS PAINTED IMAGES IN YOUR BOOKS HAVE WE COME TO BE ALIVE IN THIS PLACE. Chax Press, 101 West Stone, #4, Tucson, AZ 85701. 1992 (forthcoming).

in order to fully answer the historical relevance of visual poetry, one must first provide an intelligent historical outline of visual poetry (higgins has begun the task[18].) nor can one fully understand the contemporary poetic practice nor the contemporary socioeconomic and/or political situations without an equally comprehensive probe into the characteristics arraying themselves within and without their relative boundaries. here are some facets and areas to consider in order to write a meaningful story for visual poetry:

1. prehistory —to date the oldest artistic and/or symbolic representations have been traced as far back as 300,000 years[19]. of importance is the comprehensive overview by marshack, his summation and conclusions of symbolic representation from bone and stone artifacts of the upper paleolithic[20]. it is during these initial movements of language and symbols from purely auditory to visual representation that the deepest roots of the visual poetry traditions are most probably found.

2. prehistory to history — in the archaeological and anthropological records of rock art types, forms and styles, the roots of the symbols, codes, patterns, and images have been found in the later prehistorical and historical art and literary records. quite possibly a continuation of extremely old traditions, the matri-centered old european symbolic systems have been detailed in the books by marija gimbutas and milton mcmchesney[21].

southwest and california native american rock art provide a peek into local (for me) traditional cultures that used surfaces other than paper[22]. debate of whether or not rock art images and symbols serve as a pictorial writing system remains fierce and unfortunately continues in the narrow context of european centric assumptions about writing (such as the use and concept of 'literary signifiers') and the acceptance of extinct and living oral traditions and possible symbolic representations.

3. prehistory of the americas — the anthropological record contains a vast array of important books and articles related to the development and execution of visual language. while most heads seem pointed in the direction of areas other than this continent, there exists a significant literature that examines the western hemisphere[23].

4. linguistics — linguistic history and theory of course contain a vast wealth of information to pursue. a seminal work for me was a collection of essays by benjamin

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[17] Gordon Brotherston, IMAGE OF THE NEW WORLD: THE AMERICAN CONTINENT PORTRAYED IN NATIVE TEXTS. Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, England. 1979.

Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, THE BLOOD OF KINGS. Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX. 1986.

Linda Schele and David Freidel, A FOREST OF KINGS: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE ANCIENT MAYA. William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, NY. 1990.

Sylvanus Griswold Morley, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE MAYA HIEROGLYPHS. Dover Publications, New York, NY. 1975.

[18] Ibid., Dick Higgins.

[19] Alexander Marshack, "On Paleolithic Ochre and the Early Uses of Color and Symbol.".*CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 22:188-191, 1981.

— "Upper Paleolithic Symbol Systems of the Russian Plain: Cognitive and Comparative Analysis.*CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 20:271-311, 1979

— "Some Implications of the Paleolithic Symbolic Evidence for the Origin of Language." *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 17:274-282, 1976.

[20] Alexander Marshack, THE ROOTS OF CIVILIZATION; The Cognitive Beginnings of Man's First Art, Symbol, and Notation. McGraw Hill, New York, NY. 1971.

[21] Marija Gimbutas,THE GODDESSES AND GODS OF OLD EUROPE 6500 —. 3600, Myths and Cult Images. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES, CA.. 1982.

Ibid, Marija Gimbutas, 1989

Ibid., Milton McMchesney.

[22] F.A. Barnes, CANYON COUNTRY PREHISTORIC ART. Wasatch publishers, 4460 Ashford Drive, Salt Lake City, UT 84124. 1989.

Campbell Grant, THE ROCK ART OF THE CHUMASH. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA. 1965.

Jo Anne Van Tilburg, ANCIENT IMAGES ON STONE: ROCK ART OF THE CALIFORNIAS. The Rock Art Archive, The Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA. 1983.

[23] Victor Mansfield, "MANDALAS AND MESOAMERICAN PECKED CIRCLES". *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*, 22:269-284, 1981.

Ibid., Gordon Brotherston

Ibid., Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller

Ibid., Linda Schele and David Freidel

Ibid., Sylvanus Griswold Morley

worf[24] that convinced me of the ripple effects between language and thought; not only how they interact, influence each other, but how they in turn shape cultural and individual perception of 'reality'.

a fortuitous discovery for me was a book by cyrus day[25]. he shows how the terms for *knot* and *amulet* are integrally woven together in a number of languages: russian, hebrew, aramaic, egyptian, greek, latin, and the country of indonesia[26] this lead to my first conclusions that the roots of visual poetry are found in amulets (though the seeds had been first sowed for me by charles doria[27]). but this is only part of the historical and very late prehistorical roots.

while some amulets were magic knots, other were not. there is a wider amulet family to which these types are a part. cosmological, sacred, magical and religious symbol object types, fixed and portable, can be traced back beyond homo sapien to homo erectus as implied above in the discussion of 300,000 year old dates.

5. the cosmological and mythological records — these surviving traditions provide considerable insight into the role of the word and the development of writing. it should be noted here that for cultures without traditionally accepted or european centric assumed written language, the word in a cosmological sense is that which created the cosmos[28].

from such a world view arises the concept and the holding of the word as sacred — study the sacred, spiritual and religious and dogmatic traditions and practices and how they relate to visual representation of prayers, chants, mantras, spells, etc.. the myths concerning the invention of writing systems are of great value when seeking the roots of visualization of the verbal. many the roots of the systems seem to be based on patterns found in nature. this includes the archaeoastronomy records where the links between writing — alphabets, hieroglifs, logograms or ideograms — and the 28 lunar constellations are discussed[29]. also, of tremendous value are the concepts of sacred alignments and the role of astronomy and astrology not only as related to every day experience but also to the over all conceptual holding[30].

the list and additional categories are indeed long and can also include — 5, the poetic-literary history; 6, the role and development of calligraphy; 7, the visual arts history; and 8, economic-political-social-psychological-religious-historical relationships of all traditions and cultures to create a comparative overview and for determination of whether or not specific forms were transmitted or independently derived.

the significance of visual poetry in our current situation depends, i guess, upon the reason why one immerses oneself in the tradition, whether or not the creative process is hermetic, a useful tool for self awareness or just a pursuit of externals. in general, those living under rigid political and economic systems tend to compose works that are political responses to their environment. those of us who believe we do not reside under rigid political-economic systems tend towards solving aesthetic problems.

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[24] Benjamin Worf , LANGUAGE THOUGHT AND REALITY, Technology Press, M.I.T, Cambridge, MA. 1956.

[25] Ibid., Cyrus Lawrence Day.

[26] Ibid., Cyrus Day, pp51-2.

[27] Charles Doria, "Visual Poems From Greek Manuscript Papyri", KALDRON 3. 1977.

[28] Ibid., Robert Graves, 1974..
Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, THE GREAT COSMIC MOTHER. Harper and Row, New York, NY. 1987
Barbara G. Walker, THE WOMAN'S DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS AND SACRED OBJECTS. Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA. 1988.
Bruce Chatwin, THE SONGLINES. Viking, New York, NY. 1987.

[29] Hugh Moon and David Kelly, THE ALPHABET AND THE ANCIENT CALENDAR. Daily Press, Palo Alto, CA. 1969.

[30] Ibid., Robert Graves, 1974.
Gerald S. Hawkins, STONEHENGE DECODED. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY.1965.
— BEYOND STONEHENGE. Dorset Press, New York, NY. 1973.
Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, HAMLET'S MILL: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time. Gambit, Inc., Boston MA. 1969.
Peter Tompkins, SECRETS OF THE GREAT PYRAMID. Harper & Row, New York, NY., 1971
— MYSTERIES OF THE MEXICAN PYRAMIDS. Harper & Row, New York, NY., 1976
Ray A. Williamson, ed., ARCHAEOASTRONOMY IN THE AMERICAS. Ballena Press, Los Altos, CA., and Center for Archaeoastronomy, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. 1981.
E.C. Krupp, Dr. ECHOES OF THE ANCIENT SKIES, The Astronomy of Lost Civilizations. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, NY. 1983.
Evan Hadingham, EARLY MAN AND THE COSMOS. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK. 1984.
Ray A. Williamson, LIVING THE SKY, THE COSMOS OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK. 1987.
John Michell, THE NEW VIEW OVER ATLANTIS. Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, CA.. 1986.

the lack of shyness on my part with the use of the term spiritual (not to be confused with religious) probably creates some automatic response barriers. not only am i a heretic of the orthodox ostrich political-economic-social-religious system but of the avant guard as well. i firmly maintain the position that the problems facing the planet can only be solved when the pollution within each of us is cleaned up. the cleaning up is with psychological-spiritual tools that can only be applied by oneself and with one's consent. see response to the following question.

10. What values or benefits does/could/should visual poetry have in relation to our current situation? What does it bring to the world of those who view/read it?

while numerous positions, some obvious and others subtle, abound for discussion here, i will address a couple of the more extreme polarities. my answer is based not only on my reading and research, but environmental and activist politics, a poetic stance of expressing or trying to express various experiences and states of consciousness, and inner spiritual work including meditation and other exercises and attempts of fusing the disparate parts of my being into a wholeness (this should not to be confused with seeking inner perfection). my answer will focus in the first part of what benefits visual poetry "should provide", which has previously been alluded to.

the crisis of the moment, which is deeply rooted in the past, as i see it, as i witness it in all the arts, is at one with the human caused crisis facing the entire planet. it is quite easy to point out that the situation is one of madness. this craziness can be exemplified merely by noting that our consciousness and unconsciousness, our way of doing and undoing, has created air thick enough to stir, thick enough in some urban centers (and soon others) to have become habitat for virus between lung inhales. in symbolic systems air usually represents the mind and consciousness; is it not interesting that in symbolic terms our mind, our consciousness, is polluted and that in terms of color and microbes, the muddiness of the unconscious, our individual and collctive shadow, is rapidly taking over the mind? the age of enlightenment is indeed linguistic propaganda, wishful thinking; much like the american dream being directed by its nightmare side.

in response we as members of the wider artistic and intellectual communities point our index fingers at the blameworthy individuals, institutions, businesses and governments. after direct action, talking, thinking and/or feeling, and perhaps building up an internal rage (of which i have been a willing participant), we return to create works that for the most part exhibit or contain the roots of the same kind of pollution or causes of pollution. what we are facing is not global chaos caused by some abstract external 'otherness' of activity. the crisis exists within each and every one of us[31].

one of many negative root causes of creative individual inner pollution is the problem caused by the misdirection of the inspirational moment. the jolt or ecstasy of the inspirational moment that leads to the beginning of a new work for many becomes an addiction. when left unsatisfied replacements are sought out unconsciously or consciously: excessive use of alcholol, drugs and sex are the more obvious addictive substitutes. compounding the problem is the justification or support in the art world for the role of the suffering, misunderstood artist. all of this and more become woven into the fabric of the individual artist's inner life out of which come the works of art. for many, artist or viewer, this is not a problem because for them the role of the artist is to mirror his or her time, moment. but, if one holds the role of the artist to be a visionary bringing forth the greatest ideals and hopes, this is a tricky swamp to pass through.

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[31] C.G. Jung, C.G. JUNG SPEAKING, Interviews and Encounters, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1977. pp221-2.

for me there are many ways to read a work of art; first and foremost is that of an expression of the individual's spiritual well being, the inner healthiness or wholeness. perhaps the work is just a mirror reflecting the void and/chaos within[32]. as beginning points a detailed look at the collected works of carl jung, joseph campbell, and the mystic poets of the sufi, hindu, buddhist, taoist and zen traditions may be of use for those who are inclined to find what others have had to say about these concerns.

what a work should bring the viewer, then, would be a record of an individual who may provide clues into the process of merging with the greater mystery. for me this is the ideal gift from the creative process, the imparting of wisdom in its spiritual and experiential meaning, not just knowledge and accomplishment, a display of mastership of matter manipulation for its own sake, the making of wall furniture, either image or book form. that is to say, the visual poet should have an understanding of the term 'vision'[33]. with love the works of the visual poet would nourish the reader/viewer at the level of the soul and heart[34].

11. What percentage of your income is derived from your visual poetry work (including teaching, critical writing, etc.)? What percentage of that income is derived from government or private (i.e. corporate or foundation) grants?

the primary income that i have received from both poetry and visual poetry, as i have pursued them, is the enrichment of my inner life to a level no coin can be substituted for. i and others (kandinsky, jung, graves and wendell for example) suggest leaving mammon out of this.

12. Do you think visual poetry should be subsidized by government and/or private grants?

i have been fortunate to have received grants from both the private and government sectors. i prefer the former to the latter. but, i have no difficulty accepting the idea of a government grant system supporting visual poetry, its individuals, publications, performances and exhibitions.

aside from being a dream, my primary concern would be how to set up a fair, unbiased jury in order to avoid the usual literary ego maniac politics, the favoritism of friends against non-friends and enemies (all part of the consciousness and unconsciousness pollution mentioned above). the only way i would accept such an institutional body is that the guidelines should be generated and agreed upon by the visual poetry community. once the screening was completed, eligible individuals and groups whould receive equal awards within each agreed upon category, though the awards may differ between categories.

thanks to bob grumman and karl young for thoughtful comments on drafts and general discussion of the issues.

karl kempton
march 30, 1992
oceano ca usa

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[32] C. G. Jung, THE SPIRIT IN MAN, ART, AND LITERATURE; THE COLLECTED WORKS OF C. G. JUNG. Volume 15, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1972.

Wassily Kandinsky, CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, NY. 1977.

Lu Chi, THE ART OF WRITING, trans., Sam Hamill. Breitenbush Books, Portland, OR. 1987.

[33] Ibid., Karl Kempton, "blue-violet shift".

[34] Robert Graves, OXFORD ADDRESSES ON POETRY. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY. 1962.

—, ON POETRY: COLLECTED TALKS AND ESSAYS. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY. 1969.

Wendell Berry, STANDING BY WORDS. North Point, San Francisco, CA., 1983.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

RESPONSES to the CORE Questionnaire

Since I've come, not unlike others, to do my best thinking at the computer, with its capabilities for rewriting neatly, why don't I put your questionnaire aside and, after thanking you for doing this, deal with issues apart from your order.

To my experience as an experimental poet, for a quarter-century now, the most interesting thing about your questionnaire is that the epithet "concrete" never appears. I argued against its relevance two decades ago and am pleased to see it consigned apparently to the dustbin.

I'm surprised that you didn't ask about the relation between visual poetry and the other putative avant-garde of our time – what is called "language-centered", which curiously takes off from classic "concrete" more than vispo, though its publicists never acknowledge that term. I see lang-cent as no less valid than vispo conceptually but considerably weaker in its output. What gives this weakness away is an indicative fact: while language-centered work often appears in magazines published by visual poets (e.g. *GENERATOR*, *Atticus Review*), the reverse never happens – visual work never appears in magazines run by language-centered poets; I suppose because, side by side on adjacent pages, our work is so much stronger than theirs.

In visual poetry, the principal means of enhancing language are visual, rather than syntactic or semantic or acoustic. It's as simple as that. Some colleagues think that "visual" depends upon the addition of a picture, whether handmade or photographic. I think not, tending here, as elsewhere in my art, to work in purist ways – with words alone, numbers alone, or lines alone. The word "integrity" means a lot to me, both professionally and esthetically. It is not for nothing that among my mentors I count Ad Reinhardt, Moholy-Nagy, and John Cage.

Visual enhancements in my work must be "poetic" because they aren't anything else, except perhaps design, though a designer would be far more reluctant than I to leave evidence of an untrained hand. Visual poetry resembles visual art in the desire to create after-images that stick in the reader's head long after the poem has left his or her eyes. It seems to me that after-images are an index of success in vispo.

By now, unlike fifteen years ago, most of my poetry is *not* visual, being concerned instead with discovering words within other words (for example, "Partitions", and "Repartitions"), or new words from combinations of old ones ("interweavings"), configurations of numerals that might be poetic, possible relations among limited numbers of words on a page ("Turfs", "Grounds", "Lawns", "Duets", "Trios", "Choruses"), overlapping words (called "strings"), the possibilities of rhyme (which is really closer to sound poetry), and Lord knows what other inventions, to use an operative word that remains important to me. By my definition, most of my recent strictly visual poems – of the late 1980s – have involved video and holography. I customarily distinguish this work from *visual fiction*, which consists of nonrepresentational images that, in sequence, evoke a narrative. My principal endeavors in this vein are the several books of symmetries that I call Constructivist Fictions.

I learned a lot in the beginning from John Furnival and Alexei Kruchenyk (especially for poetry) and then Jean-Francois Bory and Manfred Mohr (especially for visual fiction), but think I've done it differently. More recently I've written in praise of Bern Porter and Paul Zelevansky, among others; I'm still learning from Paul Lafolley. As far as I can tell, I have no true colleagues in visual video poetry and only Eduardo Kac in holopoetry, as he calls it.

When a new issue of a literary magazine arrives in my house, I examine the visual poetry before anything else, and then customarily read the prose before the conventional poetry. If an anthology purportedly of contemporary American poetry excludes visual poetry, I don't get past its table of contents. That's an opportunism I find discreditable.

Your question about a community I find interesting, because from the beginning (and my editing of *Imaged Word & Worded Images* back in 1970) I tried to create a community that would incorporate everyone. In the middle seventies emerged someone who proclaimed himself a leader and did not include me. I thought at the time he was jealous of my appearing more often, if not more prominently (especially in anthologies of poetry in general, as an unfortunately token visual) and so tried to appease him, without success. Since other visual poets appeared not to find him so objectionable, I felt disinclined to work again so inclusively in this area. (Subsequent literary anthologies of mine were devoted to fiction, essaying, sound poetry, and Gertrude Stein.) By now I think he was just a two-bit opportunist, exploiting negative feeling for his own immediate benefit (and so have always doubted anyone allying with him). Since his work has neither changed nor gotten better, I can't imagine anyone taking him seriously any more. That means we have now the possibility of becoming a community as tight as, say, the lang-cents.

In thirty years of writing, I've learned not to think about the question of audience. It seems to me that I have many audiences and that the composition of each is determined by the channels in which my work appears, rather than me. The same article that gets no response in one medium can produce a dozen letters when it appears in another. People who like one or another of my books are, when I question them, more often than not blissfully ignorant of others. As for my poetry, damned if I know who reads it. My way of getting around this frustrating vacuum is simply trying to do as well as I can with every piece of writing I do, whether an essay, a poem, or responses to a questionnaire. This ethic requires my working and reworking something until it can be worked no more – nothing less; publishing it anywhere it will go, eclectic magazines as well as coterie; and then becoming genuinely surprised if anyone responds.

There is no such thing as a "primary forum", only channels that reach different people. I've had gallery shows and video exhibitions across the country (and even abroad); I've published in the widest variety of magazines. It seems to me that different channels reach different people. In truth, the biggest disappointment of my visual poetry career is that I've had no real imitators, which indicates to me, more conclusively than anything else, that my work is, alas, not as strong as I've wanted it to be. On the other hand, have any of us surviving visual poets had imitators? And if not, why not? (Is the reason simply that none of us hold teaching positions?)

I think the principal historic contribution of visual poetry is expanding the field – of perception as well as practice. If you're a libertarian anarchist, as I am, this fact alone has a positive social/historical function. One reason why I'm reluctant to claim too much social benefit for my poetry is my great suspicion of, and distaste for, those who do. Won't literary historians of the current time have cynical explanations of the current penchant for grandstanding?

I find your question about income perverse. Though I've earned money from selling copies of my own books and prints of visual poetry, from fees for exhibiting my visual art and videotapes, from presentations of my visual poetry (on slides, in lieu of live readings, which I don't do), I doubt if the sum of these fees, in more than twenty years, has been more than fifteen thousand dollars. The sheer cost of physically producing that work, apart from labor, has probably exceeded that amount, which means that I've been my own sugar daddy. Since visual poets are never asked to teach in our universities and art schools (and no one else supports me), I've bankrolled my poetry through the writing of prose.

As a libertarian, I'm generally opposed to government involvements. However, it seems to me that since visual poetry is culturally valuable, though economically unfeasible (not unlike distinguished avant-garde choreography), it is more deserving of government support (and could provide a better rationale for such support) than, say, conventional fiction. The scam has been that, as far as I can tell, no one doing visual poetry has ever gotten a fellowship from the literature program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Some of us have gotten grants from other programs of the NEA; but from literature, none. (And in that respect we differ from language-centered writers. A decade ago, the wife of a major visual poet asked the NEA literature chief to include visual poets on his selection panels, as he had done lang-cents. The response was, "They are jerks who don't support one another.") Ours has been a situation ripe for private patronage, which occurs in Europe; but since America has always been backwards in this respect, we shouldn't be surprised that it hasn't happened here. It would be instructive to speculate how the quality of American visual poetry might be different if financial support for it had been greater.

While now is also an appropriate time for an anthology and/or an exhibition (ideally of *only the very best American work*), I worry about the effect of either. An anthology of anything less than the best will conclusively demonstrate to the outside world that visual poetry "is no good". I argued that the initial poor anthologies of a quarter-century ago had that effect upon the intelligentsias of both poetry and visual art. On another hand, the principal private collection of visual poetry lacks so many of the best pieces (while its general level is, to be frank, no higher than what most of us incidentally have in our homes) that, should it be exhibited and, to no surprise, unfavorably reviewed, the principal beneficiaries would be those *not* included. This last reversal was a secondary effect of the initial vispo anthologies, to the inevitable jealousy of those included. Plus ca change, plus c'est le mem chose.

Two historic measures of an *avant-garde* are that the work departs drastically from established ways of working, and that it is customarily excluded from conventional outlets and spoils. By both those measures, all would finally agree, what we do is, *must be*, considered avant-garde.

BETTY LEIRNER

When we consider the translation between thought and word, or thought and object (work) as *representation of thought*, in the case of the so-called visual poetry (a concept too widely used to be taken into consideration), I would divide it, at least, into *conceptual* and *non-conceptual* poetry.

In the case of conceptual poetry, there is the instigating discussion on the seed of word and form, that is, *idea.*

In the case of non-conceptual visual poetry, we would be dealing with the form of letters and words, using *word* as *image / image* as *word.*

In the case of conceptual visual poetry we would be dealing with the seed or *meaning* of letters / words.

Artists who use words are 'kinds of beings' (l'art ist l'artist) who are bridging thought and appearance of thought through words. Then words turn into objectwords, formwords, being not specifically translated into the *language of form.*

This procedure shortens the translation between thought and representation of thought.

CONCEPTUAL
IDEAWORD = FORM

NON-CONCEPTUAL
IDEA = WORDFORM

NON-CONCEPTUAL
idea = formword
form = formword
word = wordform

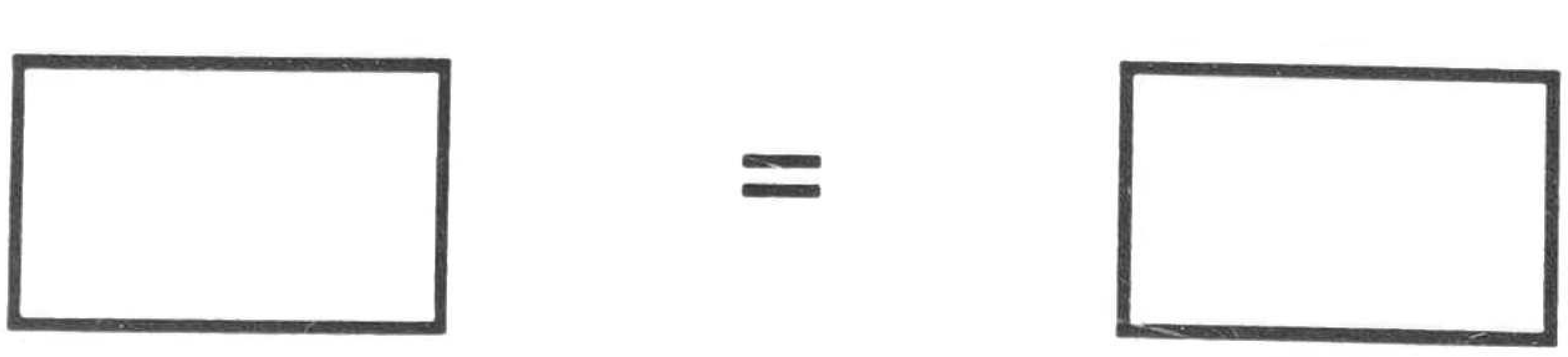
(IN REALITY UNREAL)

CONCEPTUAL
idea = ideaword
form = ideaword
word = ideaform

(NOT DEVOID OF THE VOID)

what is the sameness between the differentiation
of sameness and the sameness of differentiation
and what is the differentiation between those two?

(recognition of simplicity)



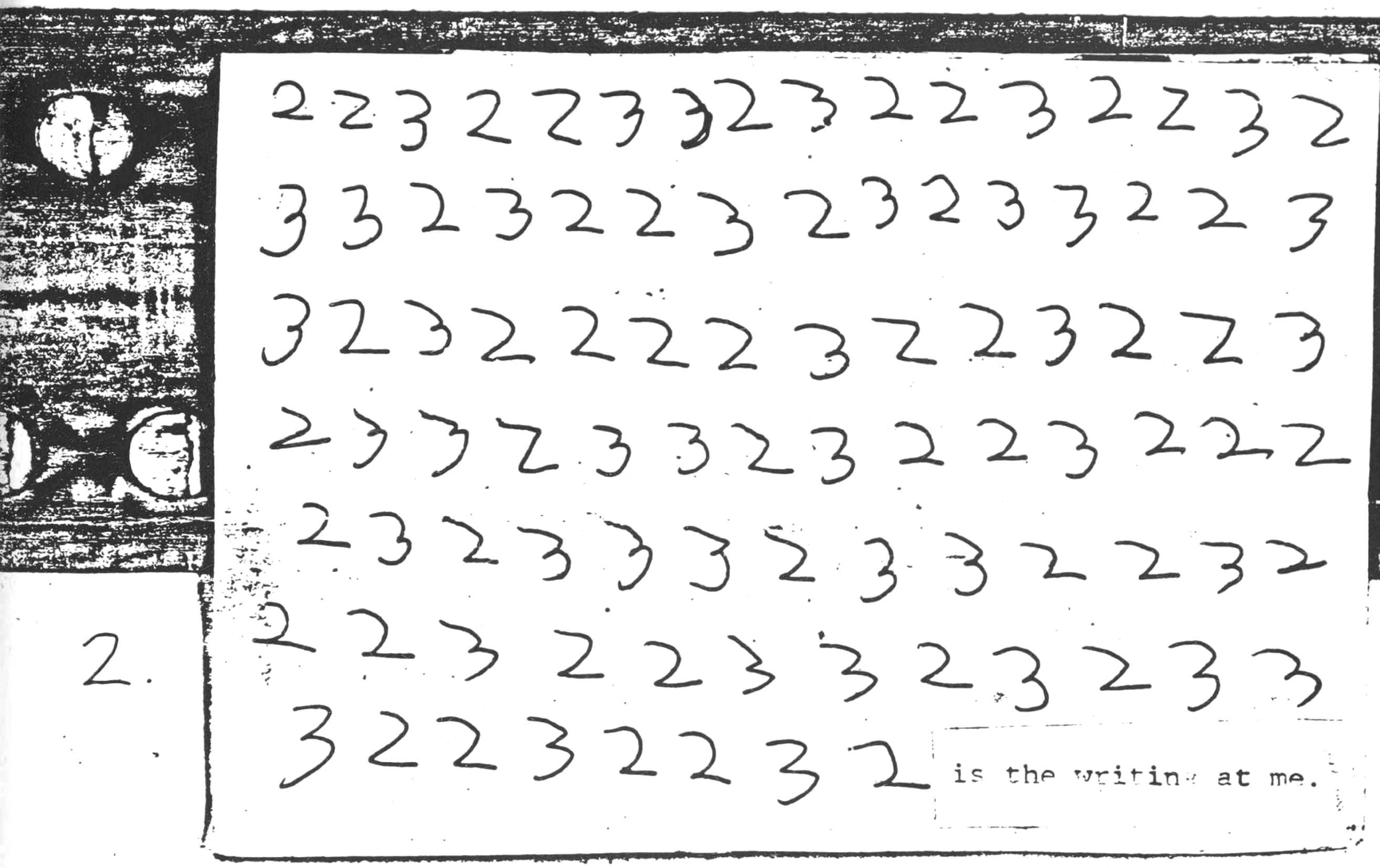
differentiation
of
sameness

sameness
of
differentiation

PETER LIMNIOS

1. dump scraps of writing thru a big black funnel.
"bring the writings to a point"

2.

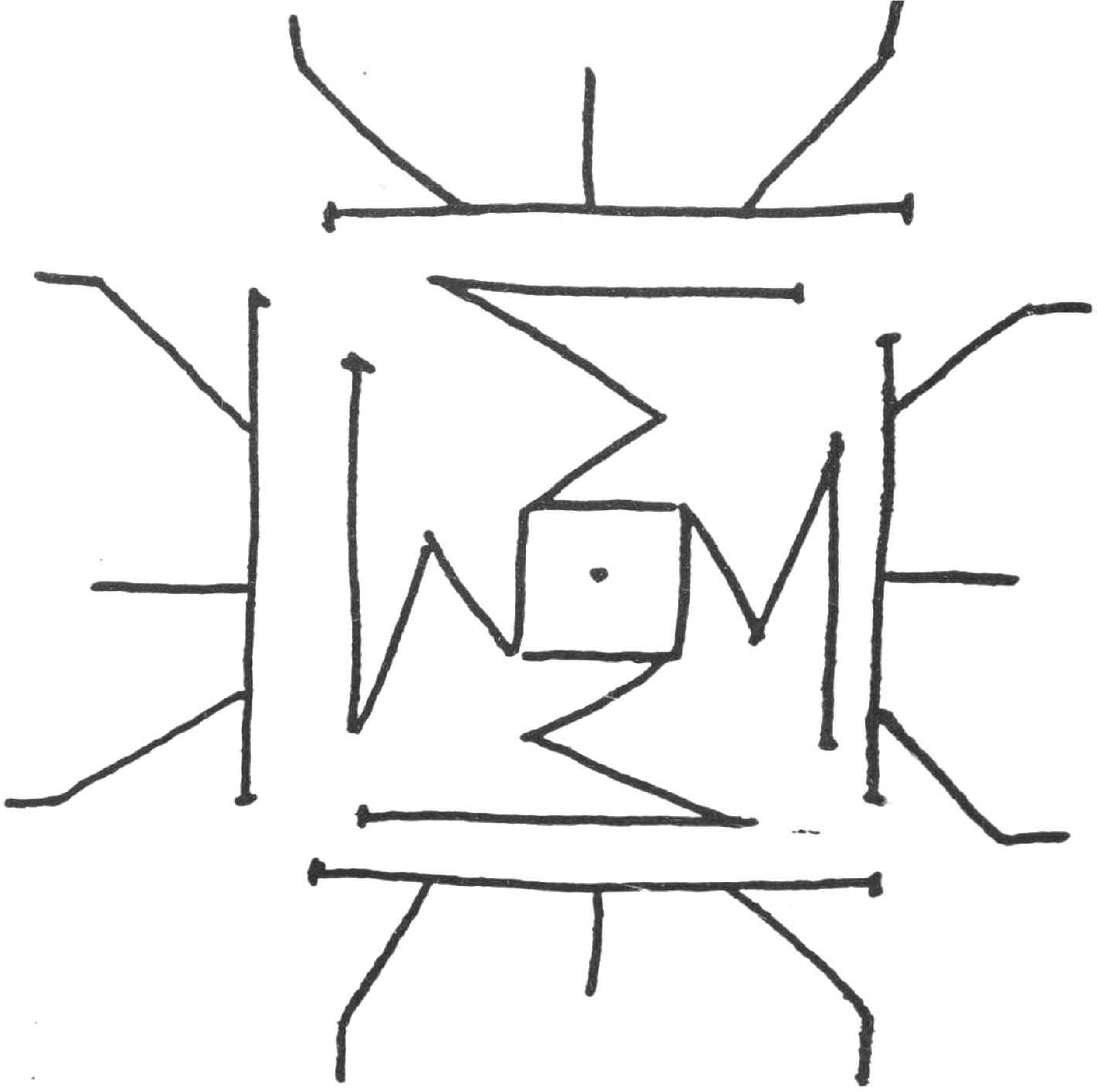


2232233232232232
332322323233223
32322223223223
23323323223222
2323332332232
223223323233
32232232 is the writing at me.

3. books on top of columns.

4. words are the surface that paper is written on. correct for dna . . .

5.



genetic etiquitte

6.

X XYXYY YXYXYYX XYYXYXYYXYXXYXYYX YXXYXYXXYXYXXY
XXYXY XYYXYXX YX XXYXXYYXYXX XYYX
YXYYXYXXYXY XXYXYXXYXY YYXYXX
XXYYXYXXYXYXX YXXY

7.

A poem about my glasses

(take glasses off, put this paper in front of face,
put glasses on top of paper on top of face.)

8.

mirror in the book

round mirror

as i am turning the book i hold it flat and open it so that the
mirror is face up on the page - with a frame of WRIT

9A.

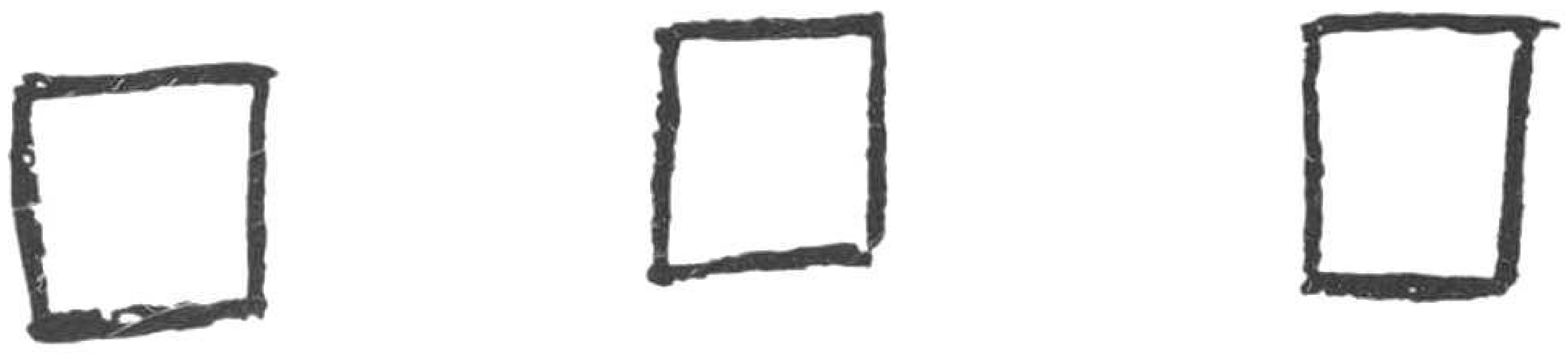
book performance ritual:
pace thru stacks at a library
taking books off shelf, rotating it
putting it back etc.
move on

9 B.

round mirror on table.
turn book perpendicularly to mirror so its corners hit the mirror
in regular sequence.
clockwise.
the book i was using
was rectangular so the corners are at different lengths from each
other and the rhythmn is 2 3 2 3

WHICH BOX HIDES A LETTER

9C.



12.

flushable poetry

toilet bowl

10. PRELIMINARY
CALCULATION · IN
HOW · MUCH · IS · NOT
KNOWN · STARTING
FROM · THE · WIDTH
OF · THE · DICTIONAR

JOEL LIPMAN

1. Visual poetry is distinguished from other poetries by a significant visual element or component. The eye is enjoined. I'd argue that poetry proceeds from two prehistoric sources – sign-making and sound-making – and that visual is solidly in the sign-making line, though both singers and signers may fashion poems and contribute to our contemporary strategies. There are interesting areas of interface and overlap.

   I suspect visual poetry requires always to strike or make some physical mark, characteristically ink or paint or gouge on some surface. Voice and the oral tradition is sound over time. Technologies impact upon these distinctins, for instance the printing press encourages all modes of visual literary work and expands its reach, while the transmitter similarly serves oral work.

   Some argue that all written poetry, all printed poetry, and the very act of reading or looking-at-the-words, demonstrates that all such poems are visual – I'm not uncomfortable with this broad definition and its fan of premises. But my sense is that most poets who deem their work visual operate with a narrower definition. But reading and looking-at are the distinguishing characteristics of visual poetry, as opposed to singing, speaking or listening, all of which characterize vocal or oral poetries.

2. Or, "'what makes a poem?" Tsk, tsk – you ought to be embarassed or imprisoned in post-doctoral purgatory till you promise to not even *think* of asking for the answer to this question. Or else contribute perhaps 25 years of wage support to the poet who pursues the answer in a rich and marginally satisfying fashion. But I'll include a couple color prints of my visual poems and if you are prepared to properly reproduce the work you'll have an example of how I've addressed the question artistically, and the symposium's readers can experience how I've sought to unify visual and graphic elements in a poem.

   As concerns the matter of "contradictions, gaps", of course such challenges arise – that's what makes the work interesting artistically and cerebrally. But I don't *think* much about them as I work, rather I respond to the particulars of the puzzle. Ideally, I clear my mind and advance by the zen blend of spontaneity, technique, and void.

3. I'm not sure I can do justice to this question other than by posing a model hopefully familiar to the readers. Envision the work of Kenneth Patchen (even though he's 20 years dead, accept him as contemporary). His visual and literary fusions were massive and are only beginning to thread into the work of those who followed him. The work holds no gaps or contradictions (other than the social and political chasms of the world). *Sleepers Awake*, *Vision of Albion Moonlight*, pages from his broadsides or artists' books are the work of a genius possessing ecological knowledge – a fused sense of art and life, without implicit sections leading to intersections and therefore unified and not bordered or distinguished by the artistic assumptions of smaller artistic geographies (often called "genres" or "disciplines"). Color, space, sound and the intuitive timing of a master poet. Type, t-y-p-e, type/ography. The page as a field of action before Olson so enunciated. And to stress your question's key word, "methods", all the poet's facility is brought into play and design; there are unending arrangements and compositions, no preconceived or predictable barriers, sections or intersections – the work is unified, ecological, vaster and more powerful than one is prepared for. Meaning permeates.

4. Some, perhaps most.

5. Paleolithic letterists & cave chiselers, Franklin broadsides, Monastic illustrators & illuminators of holy aleph, Blake, Patchen, Bern Porter, Ian Hamilton Findlay, d.a.levy, type manuals from the cold type era, chipped & faded signage and dead-zone neon.

Specific works: Trianon Press editions of Blake; Patchen's work mentioned under #3, as well as prints and originals of books and painted poems seen in Warren, Ohio at Trumbull Art Center during Kenneth Patchen Festivals; Toledo Museum of Art's George Stevens' Print Room, where for many years (alas, no longer) a permanent exhibition on the development of writing and the book was housed; papyrus fragments, Nebuchadnezzar's cylendar; incunabula and various illuminated manuscript pages; Bern Porter's books published by Dick Higgins' Something Else Press and later by Dog Ear Press, and subsequently correspondence with Porter and examining the B. Porter Archives at Colby College; specifically, Findlay's visual designs working with sundials and nautical themes; d.a.levy's work was valuable in that he was brought to Madison, Wisconsin, in the late 1960s by Morris Edelson of Quixote Press to be poet-in-residence at the Free University and I had the opportunity to be close to the work and practice of a visionary poet working the range cut-out by Blake and Patchen – levy's were the first color xerox language collages I saw, the first inexpensively produced artist's books and cut-ups.

6. Not really, though sometimes there are national or international connections that create the illusion of community.

7. Generally myself, though I've had a few commissions and successful gallery exhibitions that indicate a public audience. I generally don't work with that larger audience abstraction in mind. Usually I try to satisfy my rage or glee, working with the void of Empty Head-Full Mind. When submitting or publishing in literary magazines in the print tradition I assume my audience to be other poets. But I try to keep the question out of my mind.

8. Magazines and gallery exhibitions. My work is typically colorful with subtle shades of ink – much is lost reducing it to black & white format, and I'm not keen on publication which alters it in that fashion. Thus, a lot of literary and experimental magazines are poor forums for my work. I do, however, produce some work in black & white, specifically for those publications, but it often interests me less than other projects. Since I also work as a linear poet there are pieces that go to more conventional literary magazines and anthologies.

9. Poets who fail to work visually have to rely on literary publication or upon performance. Both have real limitations audiencewise. I see visual poetry as potentially of much broader interest – it's colorful, often funny, obviously is visually (as opposed to literarily) accessible. But I'm skeptical about what comprises the "current situation", generally a provincial premise dependent upon one's perspective and local considerations. Right now rap poetry is relevant, probably the only poetry with a mass appeal, and probably being increasingly co-opted as I write these words. Sadly, visual poetry has also been co-opted by political and advertising design. Increasingly I feel it's best to stay far from the jaws of the beast, avoid its gluttonous appetites, avoid the police, avoid the teeth. Feint and move fast, use pseudonyms, scramble identities, don't be a fixed target if you're trying to slaughter the monster.

10. I don't know. It's art – beauty, wisdom, wonder, madness, the moment, the tale. It brings those qualities to the world of those who look at it. And I believe visual poetry is more looked at than read.

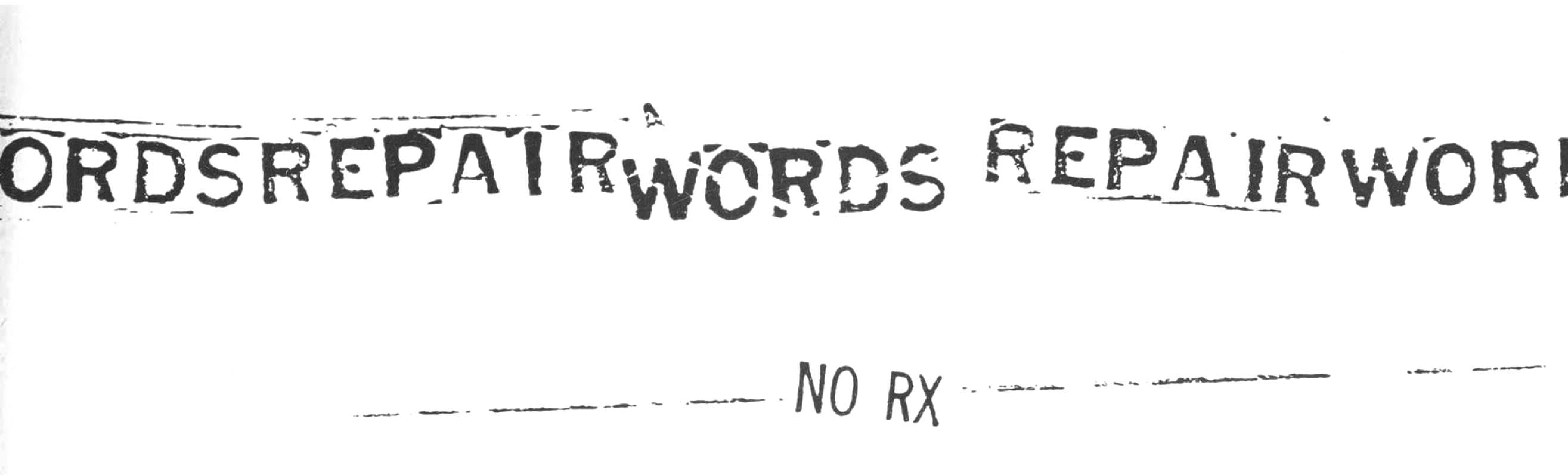
11. Probably if I didn't do the work of visual poetry I'd make more money and have more professional acceptance among my faculty peers, as well as have higher pay. A couple of years I've made between one and two thousand dollars from the work, via gallery sales,

commissions, and workshops. I've received a number of grants from the Ohio Arts Council (they LOVE the work & occasionally the jurors do too) and one faculty grant from the University of Toledo. Over ten years I've earned perhaps 3 or 4% of my income from the work.

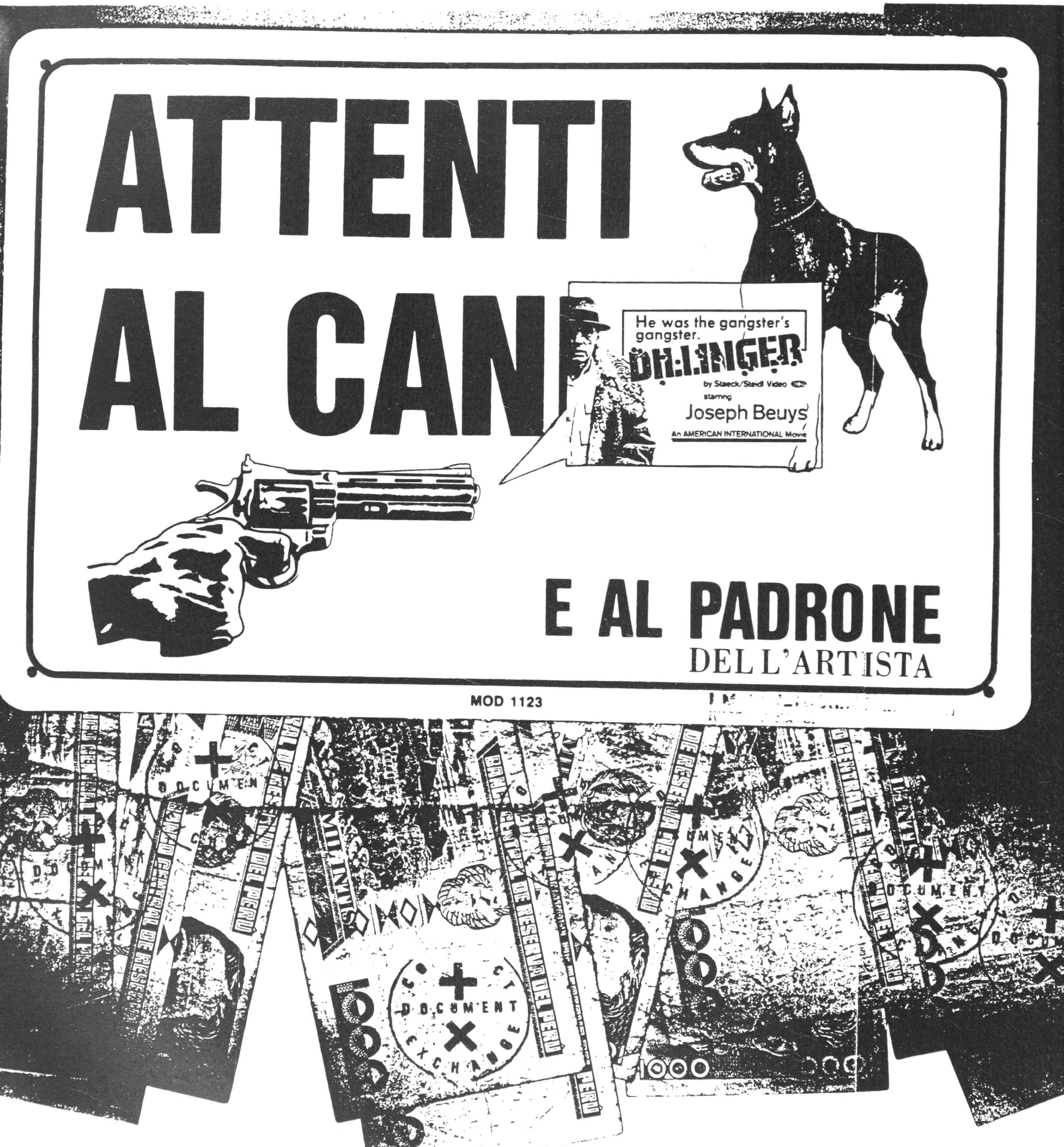
12. Right now I'm staying away from public money, which is fraught with reactionary evil and fear. There are too many enemies guarding the till, though it needn't always be that way and has not always been so. Relying on grants means ultimately you rely on the limitations and sanctions imposed upon you by the power behind the money and those are some mean and nasty dudes. I'm not going to answer politically to anyone. Private grants and more benevolent patronage pose a different question, though the powers behind the money remain forces the artist must reckon with and judge with great caution.

COMMENT:

Color and immediacy to the work matters considerably to me. I'm enthused by poets or forums for presentation sensitive to color as it affects visual language. As much of my work involves hand-printing and rubberstamp, sureness and improvisation is of real importance – there's not much leeway for correction and I rarely repeat a design. So I work with a sense of improvisaton, incorporating mistakes into the design scheme. I explore error and misreading, things which are not "in mind" but that do occur and become a part of the text or artwork. Immediacy and the concrete application of ink, the actual doing of the process, is often more exhilirating than appreciation of or re-presentation of the finished work.



RUGGERO MAGGI


ATTENTI
AL CAN
E AL PADRONE
DEL L'ARTISTA
MOD 1123
He was the gangster's gangster.
DILLINGER
by Staeck/Steidl Video
starring
Joseph Beuys
An AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL Movie
DOCUMENT EXCHANGE
BANCO CENTRAL DE RESERVA DEL PERU
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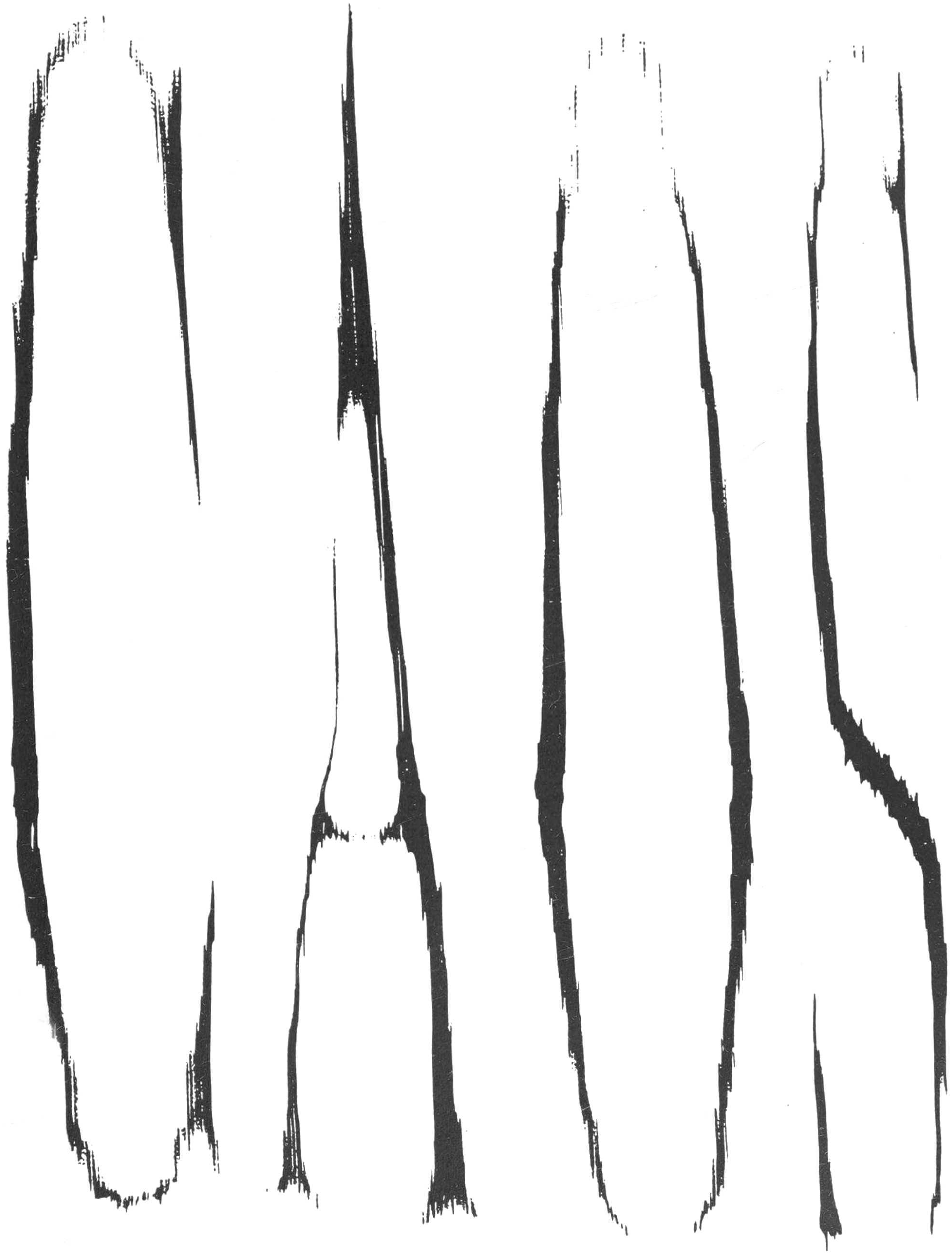


ARTE CAOTICA

STEPHEN-PAUL MARTIN

CORESPONSE

Our social environment is increasingly dominated by coercive signifiers, by images and messages designed to sell products, ideologies and lifestyles. These signifiers are generally regarded as necessary aspects of our "free" market economy, and those who manufacture them have only one real goal – to induce a desire to buy, to encourage us to define ourselves as consumers.

In opposition to this condition, the kind of literary work I find most interesting is often consciously concerned with producing non-coercive communication, engaging its audience in an aesthetic experience that demands both critical intelligence and creative response. One cannot read the work of Jake Berry, Paul Zelevansky, Arakawa/Madeline Gins, Harry Polkinhorn, Geof Huth or Jonathan Brannen in the frame of mind that tends to develop when one is watching a prime-time TV show or Hollywood movie. The work of the people mentioned above calls for active participation, asking the reader to *create* a response that mirrors and in some ways extends the multi-dimension process that initially brought the work into being. This is obviously very different from the passive condition that mass communication typically induces in its viewers, and it is with this difference that I am directly or indirectly concerned in my own visual writings.

Of course, my involvement in creating the work itself is usually not as intellectualized as the paragraphs above might suggest. Part of the reason I produce visual poetry and fiction is because it allows me to think more with my eyes and hands – and less with my head – than I usually do, leading me from and toward a condition in which "serious" and "playful" states of mind become indistinguishable. In this sense, I appreciate Loris Essary's idea that in producing and reading visual writing "we must again become the child who is just learning to speak about a world he is just learning to discover". This should not be confused with 19th century romanticism, since the child in this case is not some idealized Wordsworthian creature but an aspect of our postmodernized psyches that is capable of questioning its own habits of perception and of finding pleasure by making new languages, new communicational patterns, taking words out of the discursive contexts they normally occupy and relocating them in an expanded system of meaning that includes not only logical and poetic information but also the more immediate forms of significance that result from the use of visual signifiers.

These visual signifiers have two radical functions. First, they can lead us back to very basic considerations about what a sign is, where it has come from, and how it affects us as a graphic or material entity. Second, since visual signifiers are often appropriated from other contexts, they can ask us to question those contexts in ways that were not intended or obvious when the signs were originally produced. In both cases, the effect is to problematize what would normally be taken for granted, making it clear that the meaning of virtually everything in our social environment needs to be questioned. At the same time, since the visual signifiers are parts of a carefully fashioned aesthetic arrangement, our critical involvement with them is often experienced as pleasure.

The significance of this pleasure cannot be overstated. If there is no pleasure in creating and/or responding to the work, all the theorizing in the world isn't going to make the process seem worthwhile. But if we are going to use a complex word like "pleasure" – a word that TV addicts might also use to justify their obsession – we need to define it as carefully as possible. What kind of pleasure are we talking about? For whom is this pleasure likely to be accessible? What purpose, if any, does it serve?

Let me deal with the last question first. In the context of my own work, the pleasure suggests an alternative mode of relaxing, a means of stepping back from the pressures of daily life without escaping from or being manipulated by them. One of the primary arguments advanced in favor of watching television is that it helps us relax. But it does so in a coercive manner that encourages passivity and boredom. Can't pleasure be intelligent? Does relaxation have to imply escapism or mindlessness? I like my work best when it's enjoyable in a way that demands critical engagement, since this kind of pleasure works in opposition to the ethos of mass consumption. To be sure, Baudrillard is on to something when he says that "the meaning of an interpretive discourse has never seduced anyone", suggesting that non-seductive modes of communication have no subversive function because they have no power to entertain those who are hooked on prime-time, no ability to attract people away from mass cultural obsessions. But the potential power of visual literature is that, without being seductive, it offers a certain degree of immediate pleasure, often providing for the eye a highly accessible field of engagement, whereas interpretive discourse, for the most part, will offer no immediate access and will only be appreciated by university-trained intellectuals.

This leads to the more difficult questions of audience and accessibility. While I remain convinced that the use of visual signifiers has the potential to attract non-academic readers, the fact remains that the audience for my work and for that of other verbo-visual artists is not significantly different from the audience for interpretive discourse. At times I find myself content with this. If my work contributes something to the lives of those whose work contributes something to my life, what difference does it make if society at large remains glued to the picture tube? Shouldn't we be satisfied if we find ourselves in a community whose aesthetic practices stimulate, inform and help us to remain sane in a world whose definitions of sanity are a threat to our survival as a species? The power of this notion of a community should not be undervalued, as those who are familiar with magazines like *Score*, *GENERATOR*, *MaLLife*, *Atticus*, *Photostatic/Retrofuturism*, *Kaldron*, *Noospapers* and the publications of Xexoxical Endarchy, Burning Press and Runaway Spoon Press are already aware.

But the fact remains that unless drastic changes take place fairly quickly, our days as a species are numbered. Can we afford the luxury of simply producing community-based works of art, when public space is controlled by corporate greed and the false consciousness that conceals/justifies it? Several years ago, I found this question disturbing enough to produce a book designed to help students understand mass communication and ultimately reject or at least protect themselves against its coercive procedures. The book called for the use of existing alternative networks and university classrooms in developing forms of public awareness that would find seductive modes of presenting information unappealing. A similar plan has recently been proposed by the Immediast Underground (*Seizing the Media*).

But the history of utopian projects aimed at large-scale transformations is filled with power struggles and dead bodies. At what point does de-programming become re-programming? Where do we get the idea that we have the right to tell people that their enjoyment of mass communication is wrong? Questions of audience and community become extremely difficult, and I am led to reaffirm the importance of context – that the meaning of any work depends on who is reading it and for what purpose. Perhaps the socio-political significance of visual writing exists only for those who place it in such a context to begin with. But is this enough? Are we justified in using the term "political" if it does not really apply to the nation as a whole, but only to the concerns of an interpretive community? Such questions suggest radical uncertainty – an irreducible ambiguity or ambivalence that refuses to become a dogmatic prescription or even a coherent theoretical position – and this uncertainty may well be the realm in which visual writing most comfortably operates.

STEVE McCAFFERY

Initially, I want to state my general agreement with the body of writing enumerating and delineating the various formal features that help define the visual poem. The latter's history, of course, is lengthy, going back beyond the Latin *carmina figurata* and the egg-shaped pieces if Simmias. (The visual poem's global genealogy is best outlined in Dick Higgins' superb book, *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature*.) An abbreviated description of the visual poem's historic modifications would trace a passage through four phases. The first beginnings are in a calligraphic practice, subsequently passing through a lengthy typographic phase in which the calligraphic text is largely supplanted by mechanical and moveable type. The third major modification came with the advent of the personal typewriter, providing authors with a precise, compositional instrument capable of producing mechanically regulated texts, subsequently duplicated (off-set, photo-copy) and published in multiple formats (books, magazines). A fourth phase can be specified in the various technologically determined forms (xerox disintegrations and superimpositions, computer generated or enhanced texts, photo-collage, photodocumented sculptural pieces, film and video).

Common through these historic shifts is a constant psycholinguistic condition in the reader response. This latter can be formulated in the simple statement that poetry is "visual" insofar as it is "seen" and "experienced" rather than "read" and "understood". As long ago as Saussure, in the first decades of this century, writers were encouraged to theorize a writing based on the sign and not the word. Envisioned was a practice grounded in a social semiotic sphere, rather than in an aesthetico-poetic one. The consequences of this shift are potentially enormous. The removal of grammar and attendant linearity as textual preconditions opens up both writing and reading to post-cognitive possibilities. Furthermore, the grounding of reading in a response to signs based upon an optical, picto-spatial and not a literal-lineal paradigm, facilitates a poetry that can bypass the cultural restrictions placed upon an audience that is limited by discrete, national, semantic competences. It furthermore renders translation largely unnecessary and (at its most fanciful or extreme) promises a truly international writing with a potentially global readership. Undoubtedly, one of the major historic achievements of visual (as also sound) poetry has been to provide comprehensible poems to a less restricted community of readers than the highly specialized demands of "literary" texts.

My own initial attraction to visual (then termed "concrete") poetry in the late sixties was to its vanguard stance and its revolutionary potential to spotlight and enact the inherent politicality of poetic form. My desire was to create hybrid texts, incorporating societal discursive aspects in preeminantly visual modes. At the same time I wished to investigate and test the various contexts of the poem's enactments, both the social and the material spaces of its appearance. This form of applied investigation took poems to books, pages, walls, panels, windows, neon tubes, billboards, video, cabarets, and streets. Such poems proposed themselves as investigations into the feasibility of obliterating the generic partitions between painting, poetry, music, and theatre. More fundamentally, they attempted to question the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and to address the political need to integrate a "research" writing into every work.

The rise of semiotics should have broadened the interpretive base of visual poetry and helped develop the critical tools for its discussion. Dangerous would be a hardening of formal parameters and the consequent threat of the visual text reifying into stable, commoditized forms. The visual poem considered as detachable from its socio-economic context, to be contemplated as an aesthetic object free from its historical "noise" remains a severe indictment of several works. The visual poem's own history is, in part, a testimony to the dilution of its early, trans-generic and provisionary powers. No longer destabilizing cultural partitions, nor questioning the validity of territorializing genres, the visual poem is in danger of becoming a genre itself. It's an ominous and cautionary reminder that what was in the late fifties and early sixties a radical cultural venture, has now become in part the carrier of exchangist values via the medium of advertising.

I remain committed to visual poetry as a subaltern strategy directed against dominant – because habitual – modes of reading and thinking. And I still believe the capacity to confront, via a visual poetics, the instrumental transparency of language remains the visual poem's most vital, contemporary use. Visual poetry is "concrete" insofar as it proposes a radical encounter with the dialectic and the contradictions of its own material constitution. The exploration of the word on the level of its sub-semantic construction (its material shape, its substantiality as ink) together with the preeminent scrutiny of the concrete vehicle over any message is still a valid and necessary burden.

The most fruitful model for this strategy is collage, which, whilst appropriating elements from a prior production, at the same time alludes back to that source whose symbolic force persists as a sedimentary strata in the new combinant text. These residues of social discourse, image and idea, redistributed in new configurations imply a radical poetics of the sediment and guarantee a basally dialogic text. Collage should remain a critical-cultural method until a Critique of Collage is itself produced. The relevance of collage practice is never singular; it negotiates, of necessity, both historical placements, contemporary manifestations and lateral articulations onto other social and verbal acts. And it is the latter articulation that is most important as a strategy and that, to a large extent, determines the other two sitings.

Toronto, April 1992

DEBORAH MEADOWS

Literacy Has Its Drawbacks

If sound makes sense, why not sight? What's so special about sense anyway? It may be there to be bent.

Visual poetry. Includes history of "swan" poem – must go beyond. Once "trick" is established; it's established which, like other poetic forms, the anti-establishment juices make for fluidity and innovation.

Sitting here meta-thinking. Glad that poetry magazines are currently engaged in these dialogs, survey, long-thoughtful-winding things. Though I've enjoyed the energy of the "manifesto" in the past, felt kind of patriarchal in tone, good ideas have sex in bandoliers. Lots more attractive than people stuck in their McCorpses when having McSex, but still not quite talking to my experience, consciousness.

Been engaged with and interested in Geof Huth's *dbpq*. Way out there on the advance guard, creative as hell – he uses lots of unusual surfaces on which to print, word merging/slashing/ punning. Puns as social and political critique, irreverence, a sense of play, and as connected to unconscious dream life.

Consider the flow of the eye across the page. Let's ask what goes on, what does visual poetry do that's different? Possibly among the following:

- flow of eye as mimetic of waves, etc. as in "Corson's Inlet"
- allowance for blank space (surprise, terror, brokenness)
- rhythm and repetition, Leslie Scalapino's *Way*, magic, hypnosis, deflection of compulsive and imposing structure/world view inherited from who knows where
- listing as rhythmic visual, Whitman to Bernstein's "I and The"
- flow of eye as reference to inner self, fragmented or not, e.g. Michael Palmer's *Sun*
- reference to external world
- reference to language itself, like *dbpq* and other examples of current visual poetry, texture can become text itself, media can become the occasion for description/exhibition/ demonstration of itself (roots here in the "experimental" novel and abstract expressionism)
- petroglyphs of the Coso range – circa 900 to 1800
- line break as part of the "visualness" of poetry that visual poetry breaks open, suspended by indentation, lower/deeper movement as one descends the page – all these conventions are played with/against, ultimately reminding us how literacy, for many of us, operates at the reflex level of muscular response, that visual poetry can awaken us from that state of automatica

Where to now?

Consider the possibility of "found" visual poetry, the "swan trouve". Why not account for and be awake to the wealth of daily misperception? A friend recently misread a bumper sticker to read: "So many presbyterians, so little time". "Pedestrians" coming unhinged to make way in the split-second synaptic reading for "presbyterians". Misread the "Penta Hotel" in Atlanta as the "Penis Hotel". Taken as conceptual art which is shared and retold amongst friends, neighbors, local community it's vibrant and mysterious – where does this commentary come from any way?

Appreciate seeing those T-shirts that act as advertisements for corporate America subverted. Can visual poetry help?

Appreciate visual poetry going on with its project of awakening me from the arrogance of literacy.

ENZO MINARELLI

1. The relationship between image and word at a written level, but unlike comics, or graphics, visual poetry develops hidden or new contents, where an easy communication is not the immediate target. Poesia visiva, for example, tried the impossible aim to subvert the mass-media message, using the typical elements of media but with an opposite meaning.
2. The world of visual poetry is so wide, at least here in Italy, where we have 'la nuova scrittura', 'la poesia visiva', 'la poesia concreta'; while visual poetry, namely 'poesia visuale' includes the rest. Apart from this, 'the poetic' is just the choice of an image, or of a word, and the ways they work together; this is enough to establish my own connotation.
3. To say the truth, nowadays, on the threshold of 2000, I no longer trust visual poetry, as I see all ways already run, wholly run out. Anyway, the methods through which literary and visual got together were manifold: collage, didascalic approach, contrast between the visual message and the verbal one, the value of handwriting, the development of language.
4. Absolutely no. Since the early 80s I've been opening my work to sound (sound poetry, video (videopoetry), event (polypoetry).
5. Francesco Cangiullo made a book called *Poesia pentagrammata*, (Naples, 1923), working in the same direction as my *Phonographies*, at least from the starting point of the starve (pentagramma), and the words instead of the note.
6. No. A couple of attempts to do it, but it's very difficult.
7. A specialized audience, but also common people. It depends on the venue, say at a university, theatre, café, art gallery, or museum.
8. I don't have a primary need referred to the kind of place, what I pretend is good quality and professionalism.
9. The first two: I mean, a good visual poet must know what history has been producing, the past steps and the improvements, and of course, also the contemporary background, this is important for not being a sort of epigone. What the poet does always reflects the socio-political environment, although he is usually unaware of it. I don't trust those works which bear a 'political' message, because it's useless, much better a strike, or a sit-in.
10. This is an old question, to which you could have added the feedback which the work or the poet receives from the audience: there is always a message, which is the visible result of the method applied, or the visible end of a series of conceptual efforts, something that the visual poet wants to put into the work. From the point of view of the receiver, we don't know what's happening, or a lot of things are really happening. Umberto Eco has written *Opera Aperta* just about it. Anyway, visual poetry generally stimulates the receiver's mind, at least good visual poetry will do so.
11. Very low percentage, say, 15%, from selling pieces, or from private art merchants who finance books or works of mine.
12. Here in Italy, when government subsidizes something, this means that it is not helping a special branch which deserves it, but it is financing someone who belongs to that particular party or to another one, apart from the quality, of course. So, far from the government. Much better with the private money: they know what they want, they choose the poet because they like the work, and that is enough. In Italy, only few private merchants continuously help visual poetry.

1.

SUSAN SMITH NASH

The text: fragmenting, individuating

Wordsworth

Chatterton's influence

rounded selves,

like the "vieillerie" of romanticism

clouds you before dissolution

your vapor & brevity my only hope

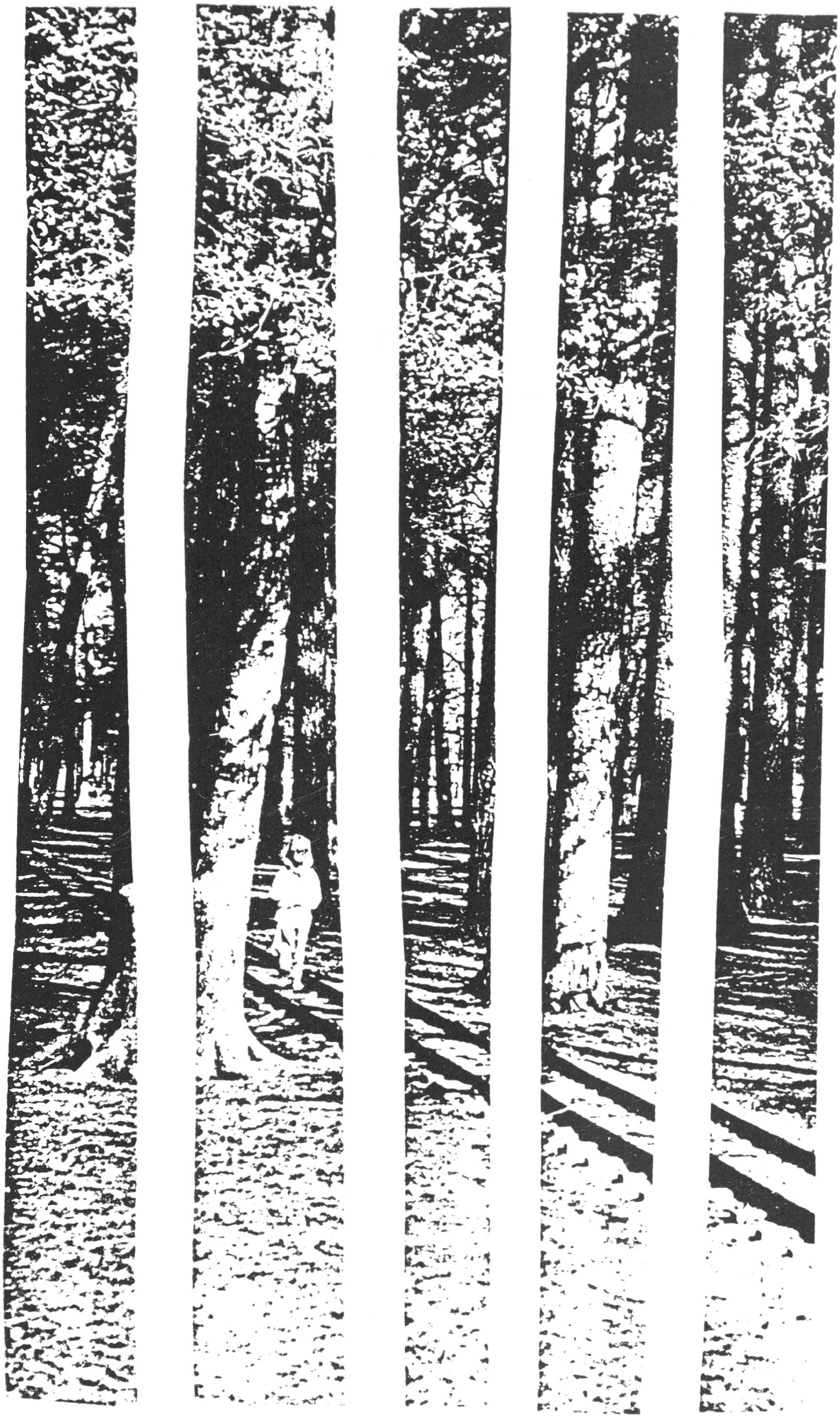
transmute disaster into miracle &

Shelley's "A Vision of the Sea"

texts blocking, dividing

a defence of knowing

(is visual poetry Cocteau's never-achieved "electricity"?)



never converge, resonate!

(I need to see others like me)

diversity in identicality

(I've made myself the same, so accept me)

bars in the textual cage (lonely again)

meaning separate, in pieces on the changing table

(don't touch)

asking Hans Richter & Kurt

Schwitters, don't cut

2. PARALLELISM & REINFORCEMENT

3. State of Excitation

Fermilab &

Wyndham Lewis publishing BLAST

Alive & knowing--

Randomness too much

(manufacturing)

a given, so accelerate

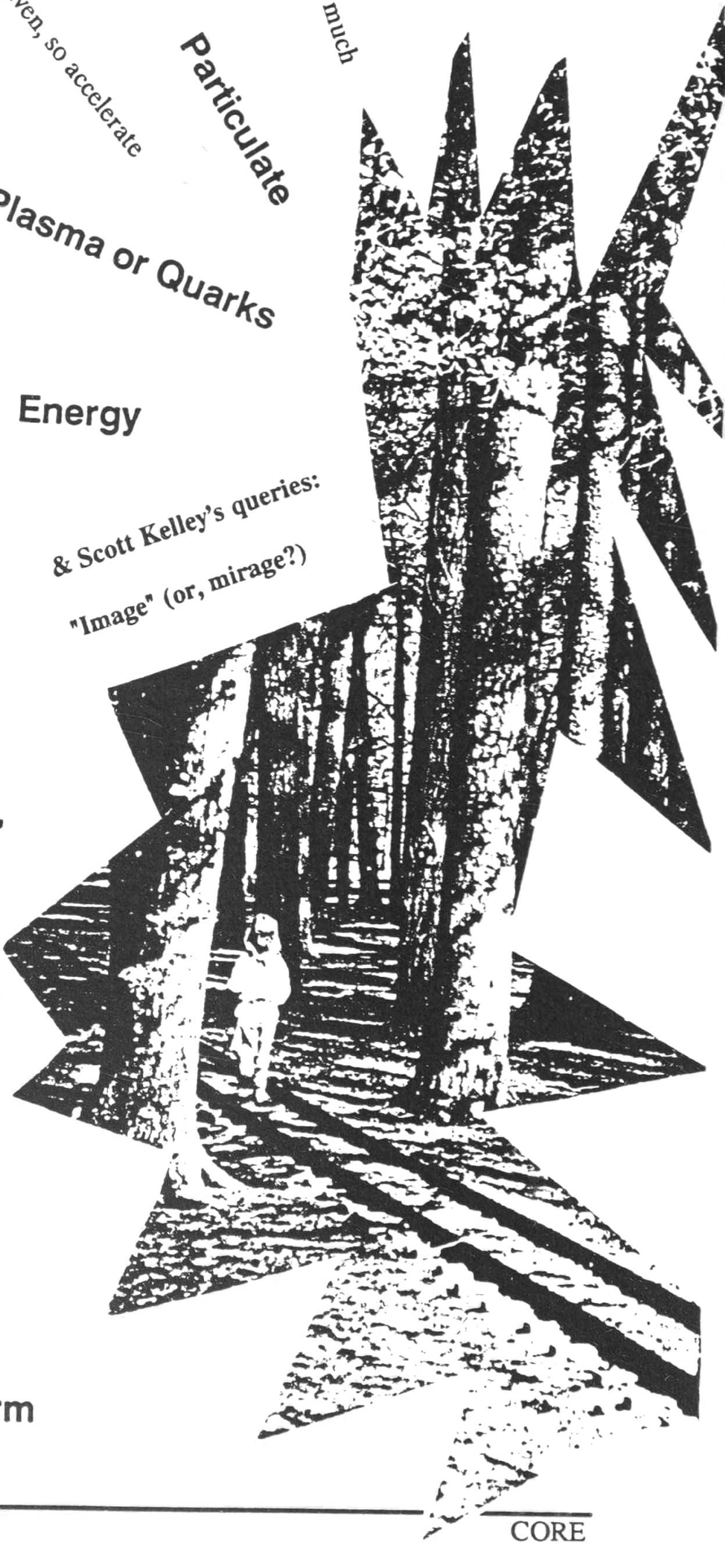
Particulate

or Plasma or Quarks

Energy

& Scott Kelley's queries:

"Image" (or, mirage?)



Meaning needs a body, a text, a shape, a form

to bombard & change

4. ANGULARITY & BOUNDARIES

BLAZE OF LIGHT: (Paris, Texas---I'm crossing over)

the eye detects the edge

an old Cubist's raging

MATTER / ANTI-MATTER

disorder

Joan Mir

Boundary: transgression, step, inner outskirting

We know

hrough the white space that surrounds

how do we know what to cross without seeing it first?

Responses to the Questionnaire

1-4. It seems to me that "visual poetry" can be differentiated from other poetic productions by the immediate, emotional, "brain-stem" responses it provokes. Visual poetry works more overtly with the semiotic, and with deeply-ingrained visual archetypes than traditional poetic forms.

The mechanisms and dynamics contained within visual poetry are complex, and it is through the interaction of them that meaning and signification are generated. I believe that the dynamics can be approached through the four following points of departure:

1. Fragmentation and individuation

Because of the juxtaposition of visual elements, whether they be photographs, or "clip art" (as in the case of Susan Bee), or the use of spatial arrangements and type-faces, visual poetry forces the mind to process the poetry in two ways.

First, there is the "macro" view, where the page is viewed in its entirety, as a single canvas. This requires the ability to generalize based on visual cues and recognition of art and literary antecedents.

Second, the "micro" view, which involves reading the individual words, both for their semantic meaning, and for their syntactical relationships. This necessarily requires a certain kind of "dissection", as the work is viewed structurally, and the reader begins to look for elements within the text to somehow stand apart. For example, a word may be repeated, and with each repetition, it begins to take on more meaning.

As the work is read in "macro" and "micro" perspectives, a certain fragmentation begins to occur as the reader interacts with the text, imposing his or her own structures on it. The text fragments, unifies, and changes, based on the reader's own act of interpretation. This is a highly personal act, and the result is an individuation process which begins to call into question ideas of individuality and identity.

Because visual poetry demands the two approaches to reading and interpreting, it becomes a way of creating a theory or explanation of identity that does not rely so much on the verbal, but on the visual – on the textual body.

2. Parallelism and Reinforcement

A way of knowing through analogy, which can be visually represented by parallel lines. Yet, the analogies never perfectly correspond, and there always exists a level of fallacy – a tension where the analogy falls short, and fails to perfectly correspond. Ironically, if the analogy were perfect, it would be of little use, since it would reduce both elements to a tautology.

Thus, the elements of the analogy remain parallel, and never converge in tautology, or identity. Ideally, the two objects in the analogy resonate with correspondences and dissonances, giving rise to a third entity.

Since we are speaking of resonance and parallelism, it might be convenient to refer to what arises as a "harmonic" or an "overtone" – it is, simply stated, the physical manifestation of how visual poetry creates levels of possibility through its use of juxtapositions (from which arise comparisons and analogies).

3. State of Excitation

Visual poetry can be viewed as the representation of a part of the process of becoming. Juxtaposed as they are, visual and textual elements clash with each other, causing a heightened level of energy to emerge, one which forces the brain to make connections it would not ordinarily consciously acknowledge.

Yet, the clash is not a simple dialectic, where a hypothesis interacts with an antithesis, with a neat, easily described synthesis at the end. Instead, the clashing visual and textual elements act to accelerate the brain, pushing it to another quantum level, where the particles are in a state of excitation.

In this situation, the elements of the visual poetry have been placed in a new context which allows contemplation of subtle observations concerning the nature of the subject.

4. Angularity and Boundaries

In visual poetry, it becomes immediately apparent that knowing involves ordering processes, and that these ordering processes have been disrupted, or subverted, by the visual poem. Order and disorder create a tension in visual poetry, and force the reader to reconsider what he or she accepts as "right", "correct", or "ordered".

Yet, disorder cannot be detected unless one has an idea of order, and its appearance. Following this line of thinking, one way of determining levels of disorder involves looking at the poem in question and listing how it differs from the paradigm, and what elements it lacks. Thus, the evaluation of order/disorder involves a contemplation of what *is not*, as well as what *is*.

Through the contemplation of what is absent – what *is not* – the thing that is absent is interjected into the poem, and thus takes on its own presence. The absence of the item has caused two things to happen: first, it has caused the reader to recognize that a state of disorder exists; and second, it valorizes the "white space", reminding the reader of what is not there. Therefore, the white space, in some ways, represents the absent elements of the paradigm.

The white space represents deviation and disorder, but it also represents the reader's ability to import a paradigmatic ideal to a text and fill the white space with it. Since the reader has selected the paradigm to import, and the decision may be completely individual, the white space also comes to signify unlimited potential and freedom of interpretation.

This freedom to create one's own interpretation, and thus, a sense of being, is one of the most compelling and life-affirming aspects of visual poetry. While it is grounded in certain reading conventions and literary allusions, it is also flexible, and validates the individual's own interpretation and experience, thus reinforcing the dignity of the human spirit and the value of human thought.

5. Particular works or creators of visual poetry I feel a kinship with in my own work:

- John Byrum: the mechanical aspects & juxtapositions
- Sophie Calle: alienation & the female form
- Marcel Duchamp: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* for the optics and instructions
- Cy Twombly: erasure and repetition
- Kurt Schwitters: the idea of a new "merz", an economy rather than a mere context
- Jackson Mac Low: the random

9-10. Relevance:

a. Subversion & arousal from complacency

b. Unification: emotional/spiritual, affirming human dignity and the individual's right to see, moving beyond mimesis to a more realistic sort of naturalism

c. Transformational: using utterance and the visual to transmute despair and oppression to joy

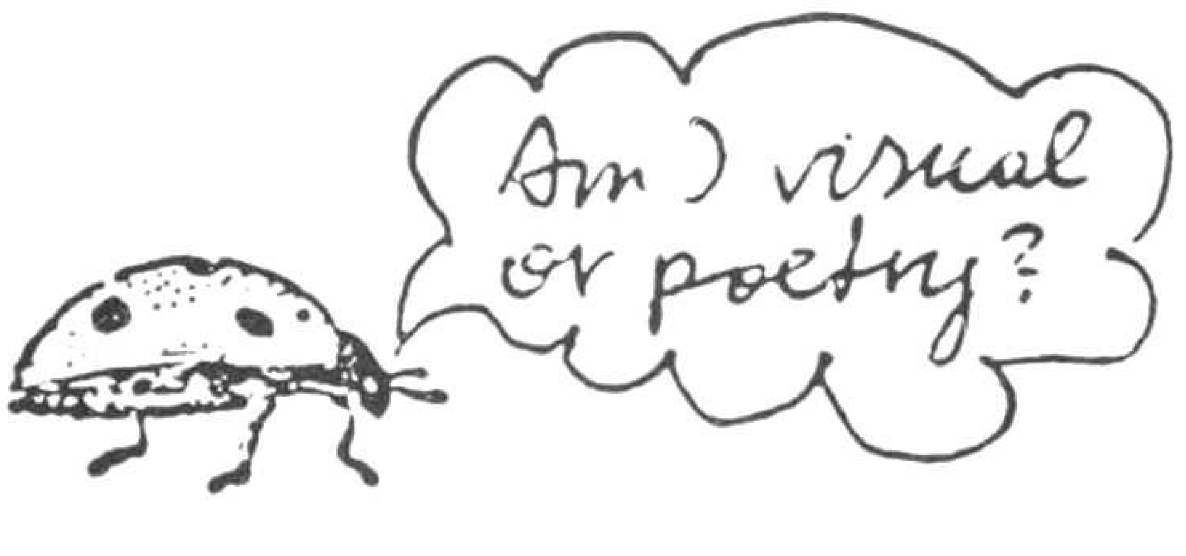
d. Discovery: uncovering the natures of the self and one's own archetypes

GEZA PERNECZKY

1. Visual poetry is not to read and to understand, but to see and to think.
2. My work is visual and graphic. But I sometimes use short words (such as "art", "yes", "no", etc.) as signs for philosophical connections.
3. The question was not understood (it was not visual enough!)
4. Some
5. Ben, Kocman, Einstein

$$\boxed{\text{Art} = mc^2}$$

6. No
7. You
8. Magazines, experimental publications, mail art, dreams
9. Contemporary poetic practice. We have a current situation only. Our "historic" ideas are a product of our actual situations, which are always the NOW.
10. Visual poetry can induce people to think in a situation in which there is nothing to think but to see only.
11. 0%
12. All kinds of subsidies are dangerous to the poetry!
    All kinds of danger are help for the poetry!
    All kinds of help are a subsidy of the poetry!
    All kinds of subsidies . . . etc.



STUART PID

1. A simple test: you can't read a visual poem aloud and present that as an adequate representation of the original work. Traditional poetry focuses on "voice".

2. I'm not sure how to answer this question. What are "literary signifiers"? It is possible to create metaphors or allegories in painting (or other visual arts), so it is not in developing metaphors that any visual element would become poetic. Words are assigned meaning in the language, and the use of a word would work in anybody who could read the word. Loose letters, or certain patterns of marks, could be used to "depict" language in the sense of having an "iconic" resemblance between those marks and marks in a language. If you do not understand Arabic, you may still look at some Arabic script and recognize it as writing.

   I think people have an innate ability to put things together in semiotic relationships – to make signs. To make sense out of something is to read it, in a broad sense. And vice versa.

   Do I notice any contradictions, gaps, etc.? Not really, because I really don't think in terms of creating visual poetry. I'm more interested in the particular work I'm doing. It may be that inspiration comes in finding a bridge, and then the work consists of building roads to and from that bridge.

3. Words are words, and when connected in linguistically recognizable ways, linguistic meaning can be read from the work. Visual messages are constructed out of graphic elements and patterns and are read as a visual message. In this simple view, it's a two-track message; the visual and verbal elements are juxtaposed. Any additional meaning comes from connecting the two in a semiotic way – seeing the verbal and visual as contributing to a single message. Like most semiotic connections, this relationship is purely arbitrary; but the job of the poet is to make it seem otherwise, or else to use that arbitrariness to subvert the reader's expectations. One could write a poem about fruit and arrange the words in a pattern poem to mimic the shape of a violin. In fact, maybe someday I will.

4. Some are, some definitely are not. IZEN books have very definitely been constructed with their visual appearance in mind from the beginning, but not only because of the visual works in them.

5.
   - Foremost, bp nichol, for *Selected Works*, *still water*, *The Martyrology* series, and his cartoons.
   - Robert Lax, though my favorite Lax works (e.g. "Sea and Sky") do have a voice.
   - e.e. cummings (*No Thanks* (in the typescript edition), and *1x1*)
   - Kenneth Patchen (*Hallelujah Anyway*)
   - paloin biloid, inventer of subprose poetry & longtime co-conspirator
   - Christopher Franke, for his bibelots and by setting the example (for me) of self-publishing

   Also the usual assortment of works stumbled upon while perusing various anthologies of concrete poetry, dadaist typesetting, etc. Two anthologies in particular: *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, edited by Mary Ellen Solt, and *Once Again*, by Jean-Francois Bory. And the magazine *GENERATOR*.

I am still getting new books and discovering new writers in the network, so in ten years this list will probably be a lot longer.

6. paloin biloid and I invented the term "cypherpunk". We share information and ideas more than work on any direct artistic collaborations. Other artistic relationships are at too early a stage to claim membership in any community.

7. IZEN books were originally conceived to be readable by just about anyone in American culture. While they seemed to have succeeded in this in terms of their contents and conception, the problems of distribution and directing attention to them in the public at large seem to be the major obstacle.

Hence the people who seem to have obtained these books are those already interested in this sort of thing: other poets. At least other poets are the ones who have gone to the trouble of contacting me. I have also initiated contact with some other poets/publishers, who have expressed interest in the work once they have seen it. Thus I would say that the largest segment of the audience that I have contact with would be artists. I am sure there are other people who have bought the books but not contacted me.

I don't plan to change the intended audience for IZEN books from that originally intended: people curious about words, whether or not they are artists of any sort.

8. So far, the IZEN books have been the only printed outlet, as I have not submitted works to journals. That may change soon. Literary and experimental writing magazines are fine places to print my work. The IZEN books were designed and conceived as the ideal outlet for the works I had made, so they are probably the best forum, by design.

Gallery shows are a little less suitable, to me, because they change the private reading experience into a more public viewing one. I have made other kinds of works suitable for installation in galleries or presentation on stage. The best forum really depends on the work. In fact, most works are created with the eventual forum and form of presentation in mind.

9.a. *Prior poetic practice:* the aesthetic analysis and reduction process has been more obvious in the other arts; for example, painting shifted from representational pictures to depictions of light to compositions of line, color, and form to paint put on a (usually) canvas surface. In a similar way, writing has been broken down from presenting realistic accounts of lives, reproduction of real language (or real inner mental language), to analysis of sentences (Stein), words (Joyce), and eventually letters (Nichol). Letters can of course only be broken down into lines and shapes, which are visual elements, and can be integrated into visual compositions.

Well, that's one explanation of how the visual came into poetry, and given the practice of inclusively reading words (and other elements) of a poem in terms of many plausible meanings – for instance a term may have many meanings associated with it that are relevant to a reading of a poem – it would be inevitable that a current visual poem will be interpreted, or its elements will be interpreted, in terms of its (their) relationships to various prior poems; i.e. the construction of allusion can be read as the creation of historical relevance.

9.b. *Contemporary poetic practice:* visual poetry is a contemporary poetic practice. A tool. You can use the visuality of language if you wish.

9.c. *Contemporary socio-economic and/or political situations:* the relationship is completely arbitrary. You can write about them if you wish, or you can choose not to. You may also read a socioeconopolitical context into any poem if you choose to, or you can choose not to.

10. Do you mean what values (I assume moral content) should be promulgated in any poetry including visual poetry? If so, then it should be (ultimately) your own values, those which you feel honestly the reader should adopt. Some would take the previous statement to imply inculcation of particular moral beliefs, but it would preferably (that is, it is my preference) be more about having the appropriate attitude toward moral issues, with the final decisions regarding beliefs and actions really being left to the reader.

Or do you mean what values are best (or uniquely) suited to being conveyed by visual poetry? I really don't know.

I see visual poetry as bringing to readers (especially those not already writing or familiar with visual poetry) a sense of freedom and control over language. Language is a tool you can use and play with, to adapt to your specific communicative needs, in contrast to the strict grammar and rules imposed in school. Language is yours as much as it is anyone's.

From this perspective, perhaps my own personal view of what socioeconopolitical message visual poetry is best suited for would be that each individual has creative control of his or her life.

11. These are rough estimates:

Direct income from printing, mailing, etc. = -10% (i.e., cost rather than income)

If you include costs of traveling to distribute books and maintain contacts, and then all that is spent in adding to my library, income = -30%

Direct income from grants = 0%

Indirect income from grants comes from a few bookstores which receive grant money, a private archive which buys books, one library that ordered a set (total about $100), plus an unknown amount from performing in an arts festival that obtained funding from the Ohio Arts Council.

12. Not particularly. It's as deserving of funding as any other art, though the question of what's a fair divvying up of the arts pie gets to be a complicated problem.

Granting agencies need to keep some realistic idea of what it is they are funding, and should realize that's basically what they'll get, and it may not necessarily always be to their taste. Commissions and purchases are a different matter, as they involve obtaining a specific piece of art as opposed to providing support for the artist.

I am wary of obtaining money from these agencies because at some point there will be some demand for control attached. We are seeing this in the form of the ongoing NEA battle, where Congress and the public seem to assume giving grants is like buying art.

HARRY POLKINHORN

1. Visual poetry activates the ground of non-visual poetry, making it into a signifier. (See list of publications under #3 below, where I deal with this question more adequately.)

2. (See list of publications under #3 below, where I deal with this question more adequately.)

3. I can't give a summary in answer to these questions but have dealt extensively with them for several years. The following is a list of publications where I have written on these issues:

    1. "The Last Decade: III International Biennial of Visual/Experimental Poetry," *Central Park*, No. 19/20 (New York City, NY: Neword Productions, Spring/Fall, 1991), pp. 318-20.

    2. "Gender Event," *American Book Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct.-Nov., 1991), p. 10.

    3. "Visual Poetry in Latin America," *Innovations 1*, (Maple City, MI: Innovations Press, 1991), pp. 180-84.

    4. "On Difficulty in Verbal Visual Art," *PhotoStatic*, 40 (Iowa City, IA: PhotoStatic Books, Dec., 1989), pp. 1501-3.

    5. "Notes on Typography," *Central Park*, No.15 (New York City, NY: Neword Productions, Spring, 1989), pp. 127-32.

    6. "Visual Writing and Contemporary Culture: Excerpts from an Interview with Harry Polkinhorn," Tom Hibbard, *Generator 3*, (Mentor, OH: Generator Press, Summer, 1989), pp. 35-40.

    7. "Seeing Power: Politics of Visual Writing," *Central Park*, No. 14 (New York City, NY: Neword Productions, Fall, 1988), pp. 145-9.

    8. "The Image Speaks," *Tempus Fugit*, No. 5 (Belgium: Summer, 1987), p. 127.

    9. "Untying the Not: Karl Kempton's Visual Writing," *Access: A Journal of Post-Literature*, No. 1 (Summer, 1987, pp. 5-12.

    10. "Hysteria," *American Imago*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), pp. 1 14.

    11. "The Visual Poem," *Score 7*, (Oakland, CA: Score Publications, Spring, 1986).

    12. "The Gyroscope and the Junk Heap: Ideological Consequences of Latin American Experimentalism," *Image and Ideology in Modern/PostModern Discourse*, ed. by David B. Downing and Susan Bazargan, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 181-98.

    13. "Introduction: Art on the Edge," *Visual Arts on the U.S./Mexican Border*, (Calexico, CA/Mexicali, Baja California: Binational Press, 1991), pp. 13-18.

    14. "Introduction," Richard Kostelanetz, *Fields/Pitches/Turfs/Arenas*, (Port Charlotte, FL: Runaway Spoon Press, 1991).

15. "Gnosis: Clemente Padín's Signographics and Texts," *Signographics and Texts*, by Clemente Padín, (Madison, WI: Xexoxial Editions, 1990).

16. "Concluding Thoughts," *Piecemeal VIII*, (Port Charlotte, FL: Runaway Spoon Press, 1989).

17. "Remembering to Forget," ed. Mary Ann Caws, *Perspectives on Perception: Philosophy, Art, and Literature*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 123-38.

18. "Space Craft: Collage Discourse," ed. Katherine Hoffman, *Collage: Critical Views*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 213-24.

19. "Introduction," Guy Beining, *Piecemeal I*, (Port Charlotte, FL: Runaway Spoon Press, 1988).

20. "Introduction," Guy Beining, *Piecemeal II*, (Port Charlotte, FL: Runaway Spoon Press, 1988).

21. "Introduction," Guy Beining, *Atollments*, (Iowa City, IA: PhotoStatic Books, 1987).

4. Some.

5. Among contemporaries: Richard Kostelanetz, Dick Higgins, Clemente Padín, César Espinosa, Fernando Aguiar, Enzo Minarelli, Philadelpho Menezes, Guy Beining, Jake Berry, Miekel And, Liz Was, Geoffrey Cook, Ugo Carrega, Karl Kempton, each for different reasons. There are many others.

6. It is unclear what you mean by "community". I am in contact with a number of visual poets and occasionally have the opportunity to meet with them in person.

7. For work published in magazines, the audience is probably restricted. I also exhibit in international mail-art shows, which often have large audiences from the general public.

8. Experimental publications, mail-art exhibitions, non-commercial gallery shows.

9. My visual poetry is based on prior historical poetic practice. Study of the past has helped to shape my understanding of the world and the role of poetry (of all persuasions) in it. By and large, visual poetry is not in and of itself more critical of the status quo than is linear poetry, except perhaps in a formal and ultimately insignficant sense. That is, a visual poem as a formal object can be progressive or reactionary (or fall somewhere in between), as is the case with any other art medium. My own work is classifiable as left of center and concerned with the ideological-formal qualities of medium.

   I don't understand part b. of this question.

10. Visual poetry should promote clear thinking and fresh perception, always needed in the world we inhabit.

11. Zero.

12. No money comes without strings attached.

1. Visual poetry is visual poetry because of its profound interest in and exploitation of the visual aspects of language. Visual poetry is an extension of poetics into areas not formerly opened to poetic expression.

   The visual poem manipulates language in ways other poems do not. Because of visual manipulations, these poems become non-linear not only in the format of individual works but in the conception of the work as well. More conventional poetry is written (and so read) sequentially and therefore the impressions the reader receives are linear in time. With visual poems, the eye scans the page in a non-sequential way (or, rather, the eye determines its own sequence). A visual poem may be "read" in any direction without concern for any implicit sequence within the poem. Visual poetry seems to come at the reader head-on as opposed to bit by bit.

   With more conventional poetry, images are conveyed to the reader by words and are to be reconstituted, reconstructed in the reader's mind. With visual poetry the image and the poem are one entity – there is no reconstructing to be done. The poem is happening on the page in a much more physical, tactile sense. The visual poem is immediate.

   This immediacy is often enhanced by the incorporation of non-literary elements. These elements tend to engage more of the reader's faculties than would otherwise be needed with non-visual poetries.

   The immediacy of the visual poem signals a shift in the way the work affects the reader. The meanderings into the visual side of language and the experiments of combining language with non-literary elements have enlarged the way in which a poem can have meaning. With its increased physical presence, the visual poem more closely parallels the workings of the world. The meaning that is created is not so much one of denotation but a meaning born of affinities. The meaning in these works is achieved by creating resonances with the outside world. The visual poem seems to point to meaning without demanding it. This pointing may be its most distinguishing characteristic.

2. When confronted with a page that contains both words and non-literary information, the viewer's eye seems to find the words and attempts to read them before dealing with any non-literary signs. In a way, this tendency forms the ground for visual poetry. The words seem to hold an implicit dominance (i.e., the "viewer" becomes a "reader" instantaneously).

   The conventions of language are so strong that some small black marks will alway be recognized as letters and collections of these small black marks will always be read as word-forms. This immediately puts other graphic material into a secondary role and is thereby "read" as substantiating or clarifying the meanings of the previously found words.

   The words are entities before they are put onto the page. The page of the visual poem acts as a new environment into which these entities may be inserted. The interaction between the words and their new environment is the stuff of the poem.

3. Meaning of both types can be found in visual poetry. These are the tools of the visual poet. Each type of meaning lends support to the other. Visual poetry makes use of spatial relationships as well as syntactic relationships to establish itself. Whereas the strictly

literary portions may be ceded dominance, the more graphic elements bring to bear their readings to create an enhanced set of meanings.

Visual poetry is the confluence of literary sign and non-literary sign into an amalgam which is more than just the sum of the two. The goal is to have the interaction of the literary and non-literary become a new entity with its own properties – properties which are not intrinsic to either element independently. The effort is to forge something new from formerly distinct means of communicating. Language remains the crux of this effort and as a result what is created is a literary construct.

4. Most.

5. –

6. My sole connection with other visual poets is through magazines and exhibitions.

7. –

8. The three examples listed but in reverse order.

9. I think of visual poetry as merely a furtherance of previous poetic practice.

10. The reader has his/her own world. Poetry, visual or otherwise, can at best make the reader more sensitive to what s/he already knows. So much of poetry and art depends on a reader's or viewer's pre-disposition. The Chinese have a saying, "what comes in through the gates is foreign." Which is to say that if it does not come from within oneself it is of no value. Poetry cannot come in through the gates.

11. 0%

12. Arbeit macht frei.

COMMENTS:

Please pass the can opener –
I've just been handed this large container of worms.

MARILYN ROSENBERG

1. Most poetry sits passively on the page or in the book, the typeface selected by the publisher, the poetry activated by the contents of the words in the mind of the reader.

In my visual poetry the words and images are neither binaries in conflict, nor one illustrating or amplifying the other. Visual poetry allows and mandates the word to become image, and the image functions like words. What this means then is that the word and image are so interlocked, so interfolded, one does not function without the other, meaning does not happen without the other segment, OR both the visual and verbal are exactly the same element. Many meanings emerge with each reading-seeing as the viewer-reader completes the work, finishing the message, with more stimulators than in traditional poetry. Content, vehicle, form, medium, and concept unify, merge, and are *the work* better than any description. Art that is meant to be experienced, when talked about often loses its impact and becomes rigid beyond objectification. Yet we all do talk about what we do, if only to touch another mind.

4. The word 'poetic' itself is problematic. If the word means, as it does to some:
   a. Expressions, words and phrases never used in ordinary speech; language made up of deviations, out of the ordinary speech or writing, sometimes language from present usage or sometimes from a different time in history; or
   b. English/American language that includes ornate/minimal diction filled with other languages, both contemporary and archaic usages, personal abstractions or my newly created words, i.e. poetic diction. (I suspect you are not referring to Aristotle's task of 'Poetics', a systematic theory of literature, literary study or that of literary criticism. (And, I do not think you are referring to 'poetics' as in Todorov's *Poetics of Prose*, explained in part by Culler in his intro, the "systematic study of literature attempts to specify the codes and conventions which make these meanings (of sentences or words) possible; just as linguistics, the systematic study of language, makes explicit the rules and conventons of a language." No, I don't think you mean that, but yet you may allude to it in some of your questions.)

Then yes, all of my language usage, wherever it is found, is poetic. The work is creative, it does have various types of verbal imagery, and could be said to have poetic insight and takes poetic liberties. And all of my work is visual as well. So the logical answer should be yes. But, I also create visual narratives, in other words, visual prose. And in some ways my visual prose narratives could be called visual prose-poetry. So therefore all of my productions are poetic and all are visual poetry, at least by my definition.

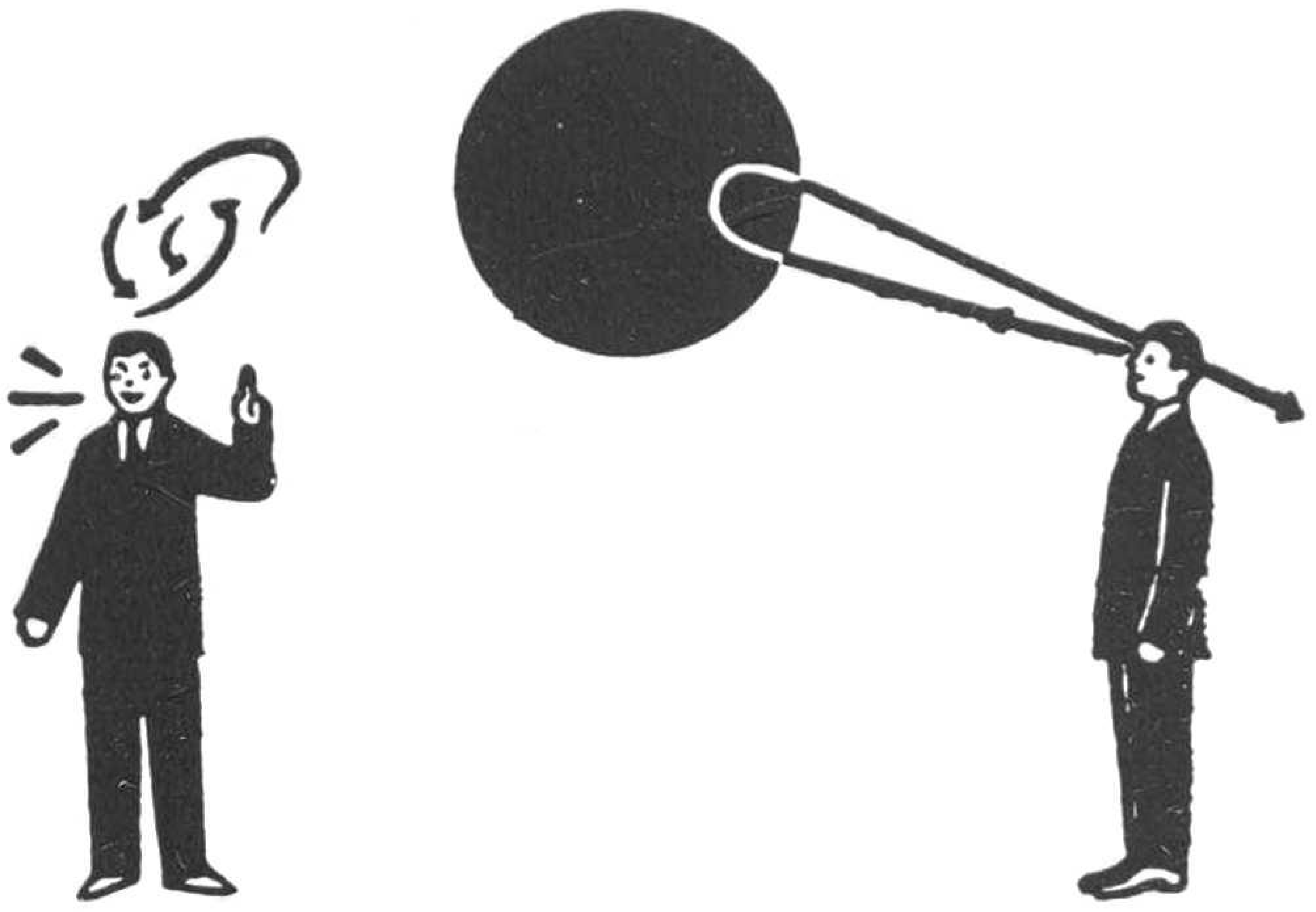
Questions 5, 6, and 7 are at least partially related.

I feel a kinship with all creators, and specifically with all creators of visual poetry, even with those I don't know or do know, and whose works are very different from mine. Those creators of visual poetry I feel a kinship with in my own work are part of my community, even if I don't know the creator personally. I have a stronger kinship with creators who are also audience. Audience need not be limited to visual poets. Audience can also be, and has also included, collaborators. Participation in the community includes collaboration, exchanges in the mail, reading of another's work and/or another's reading of my work. Participation can also mean participation or inclusion in a publication or compilation. My word for community may be more broadly based than some would like, and my audience also does include people who see/read my visual poetry because they are seeing either electrographic prints or artists' books. You see, the line is very blurred between communities and audiences.

8. Experimental publications, visual poetry exhibitions, university and library exhibitions of artists' books, are all forums for my works, and believe it or not archives and collections are as well. The archives and collections act as forum, allowing those in the future to be audience.

SPENCER SELBY

1.



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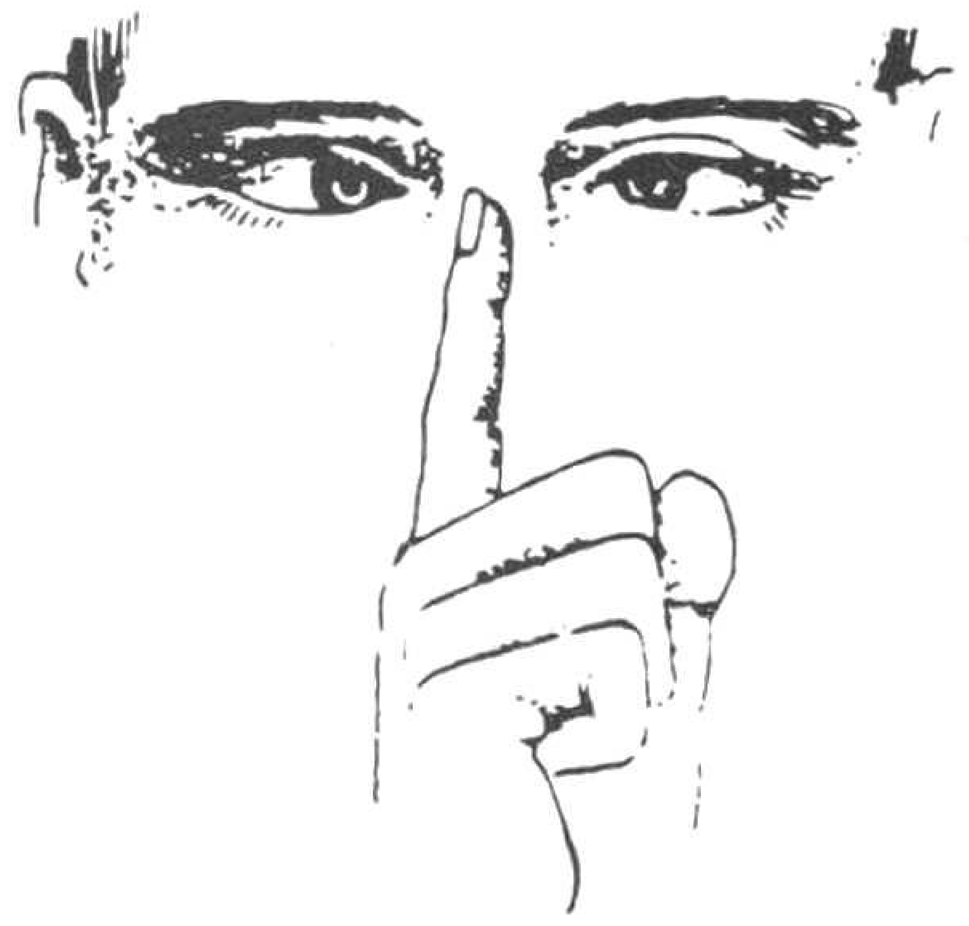

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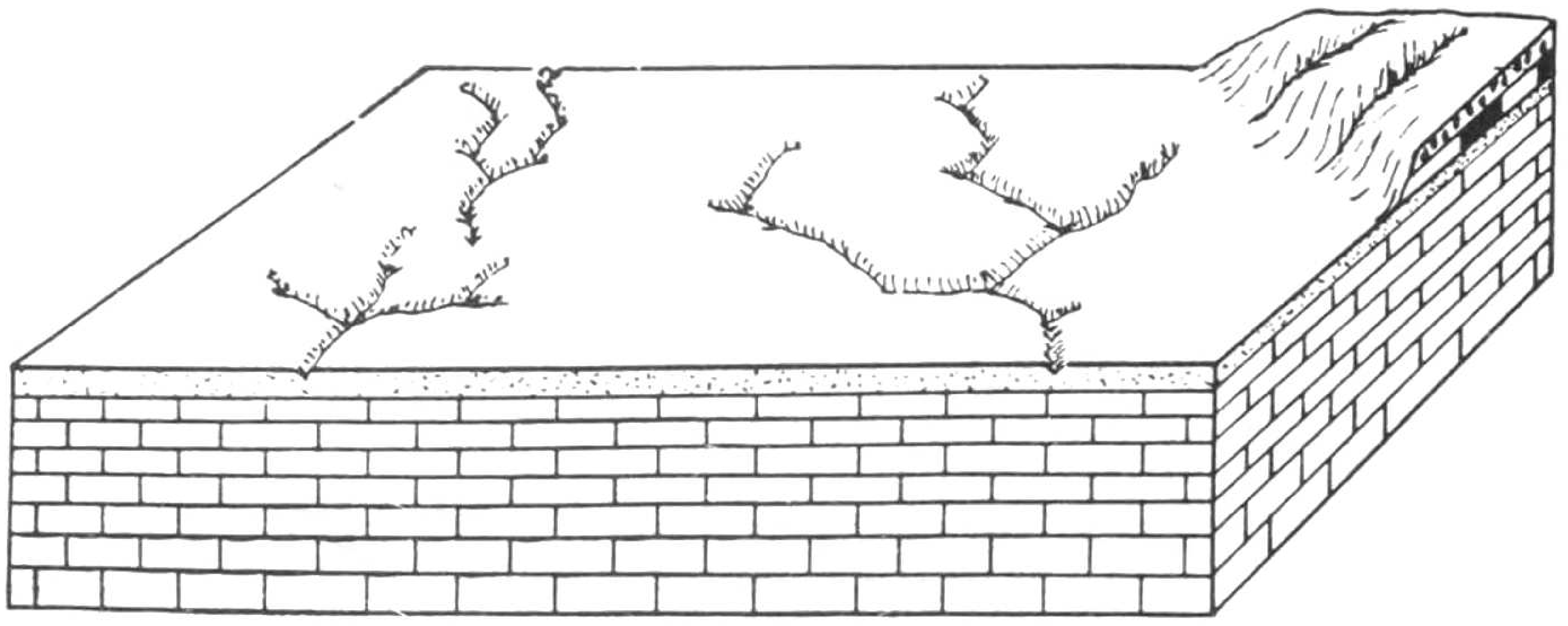

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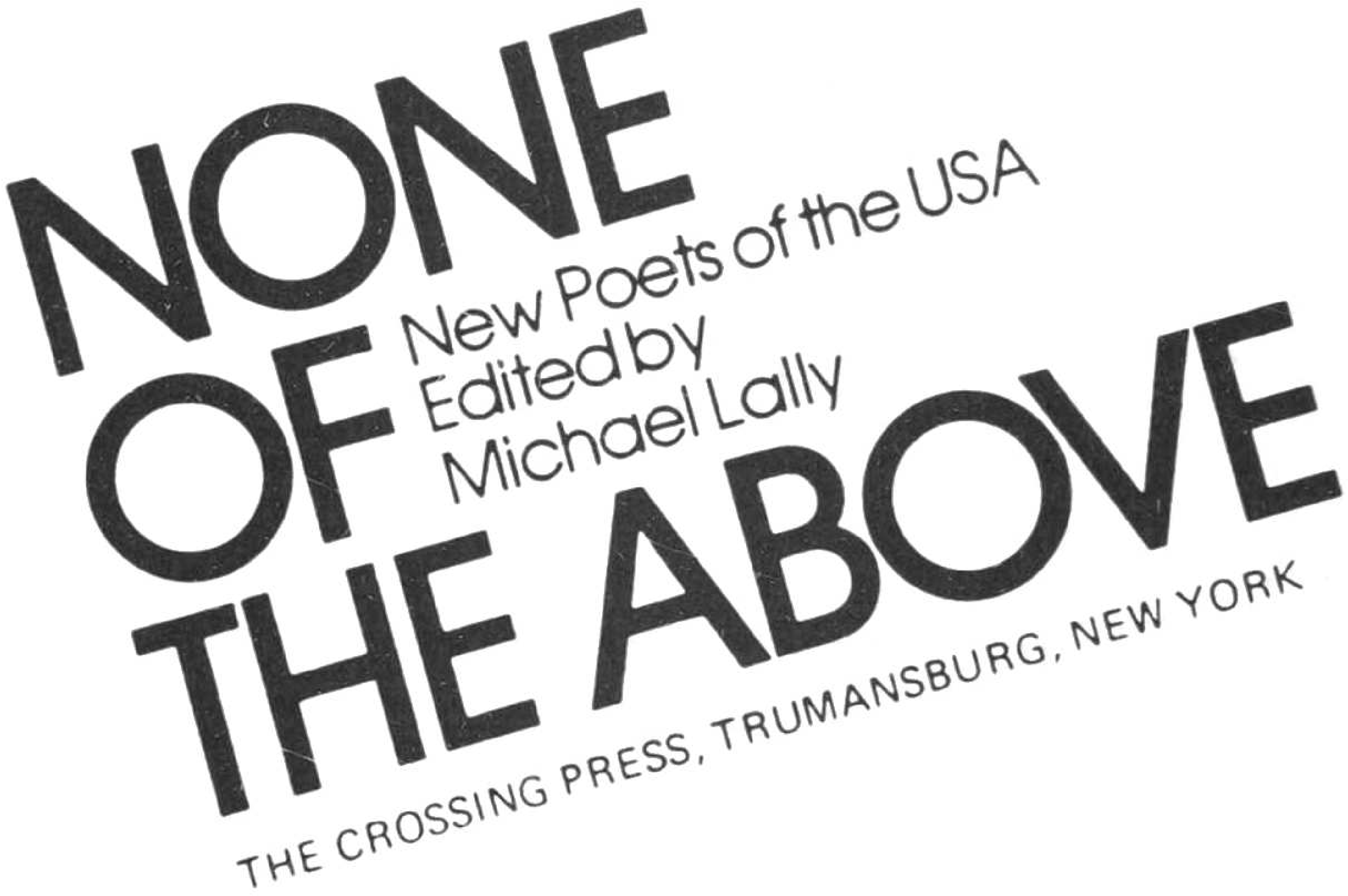
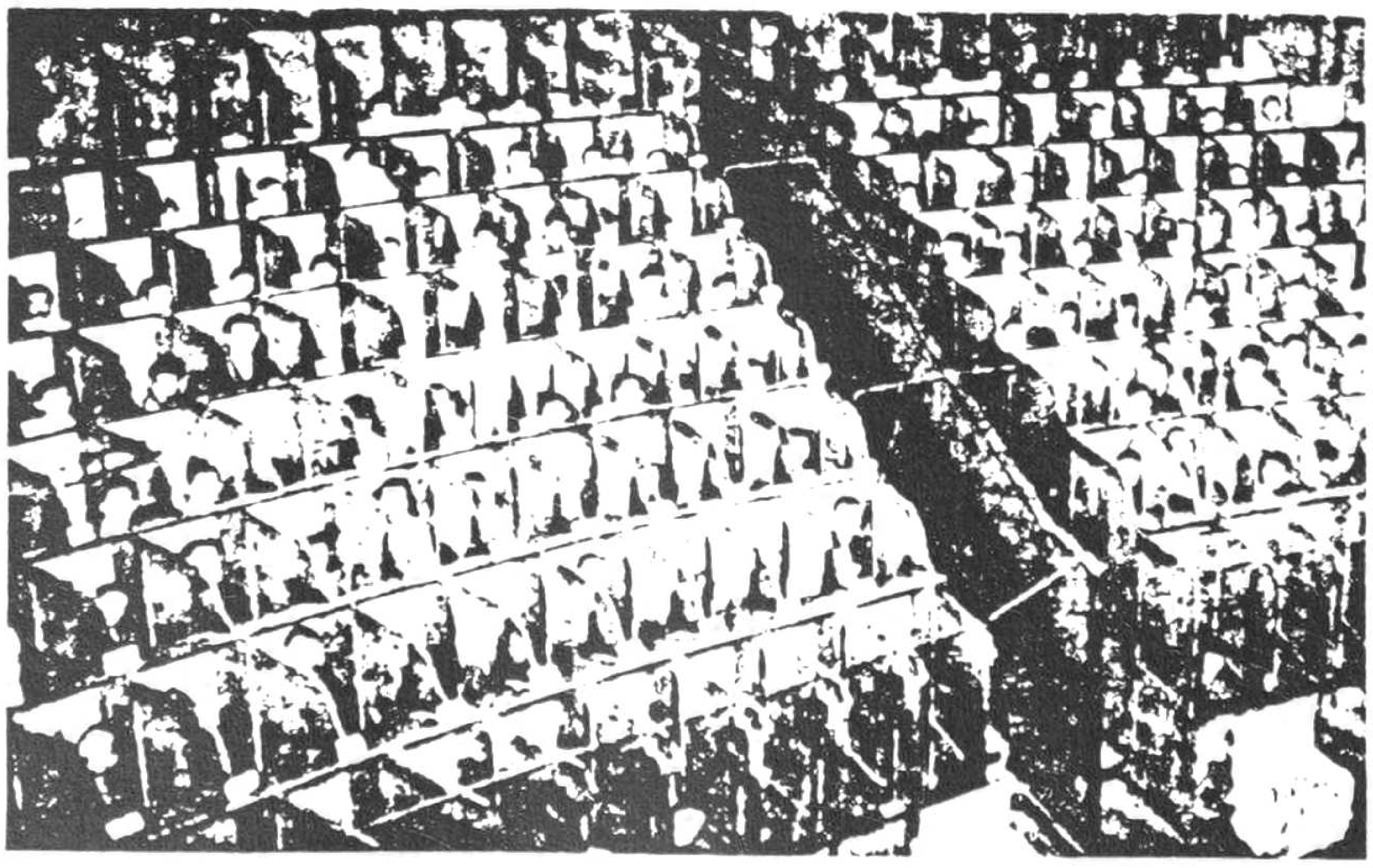


NONE
OF
THE ABOVE
New Poets of the USA
Edited by
Michael Lally
THE CROSSING PRESS, TRUMANSBURG, NEW YORK

6.



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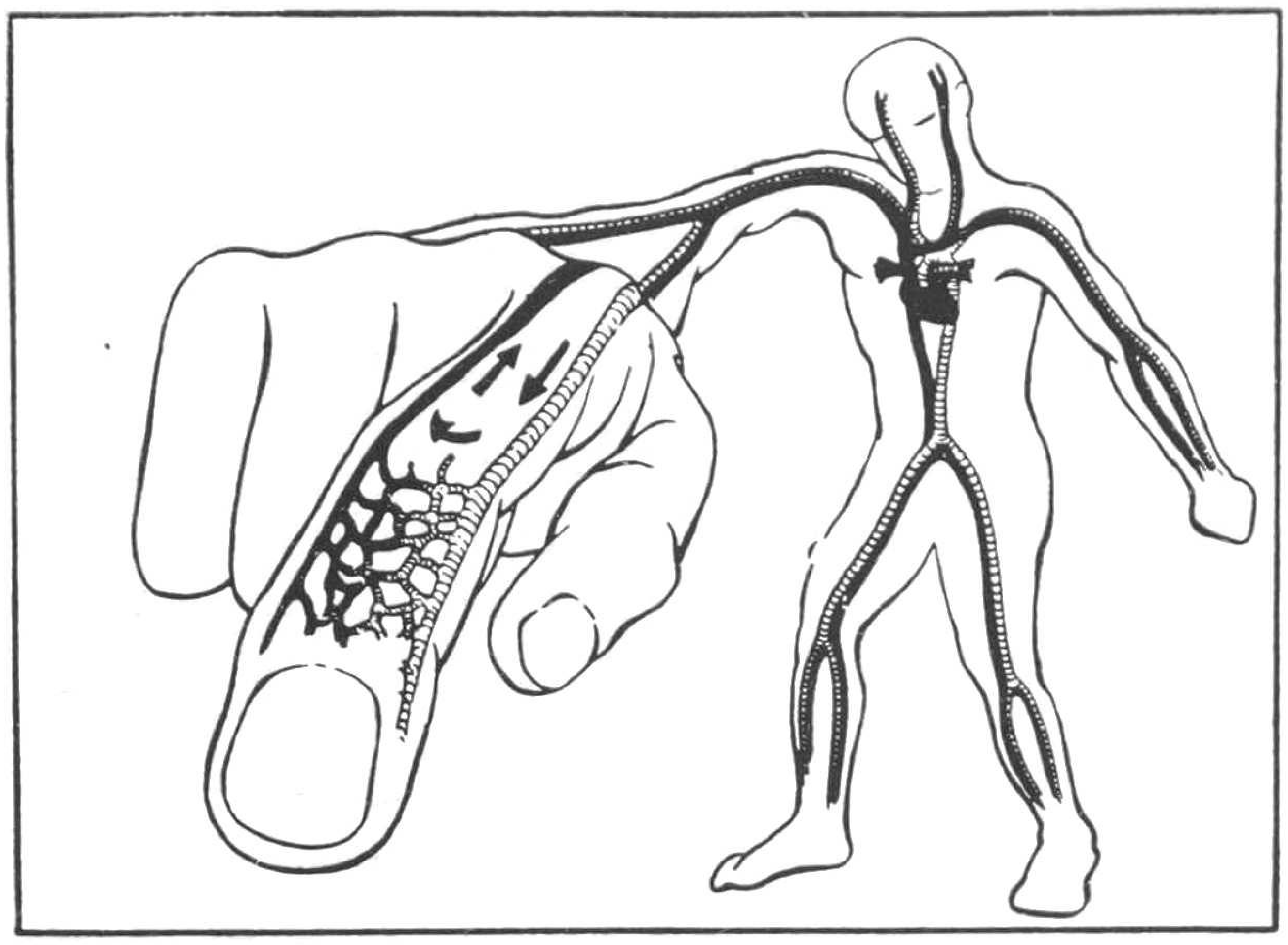

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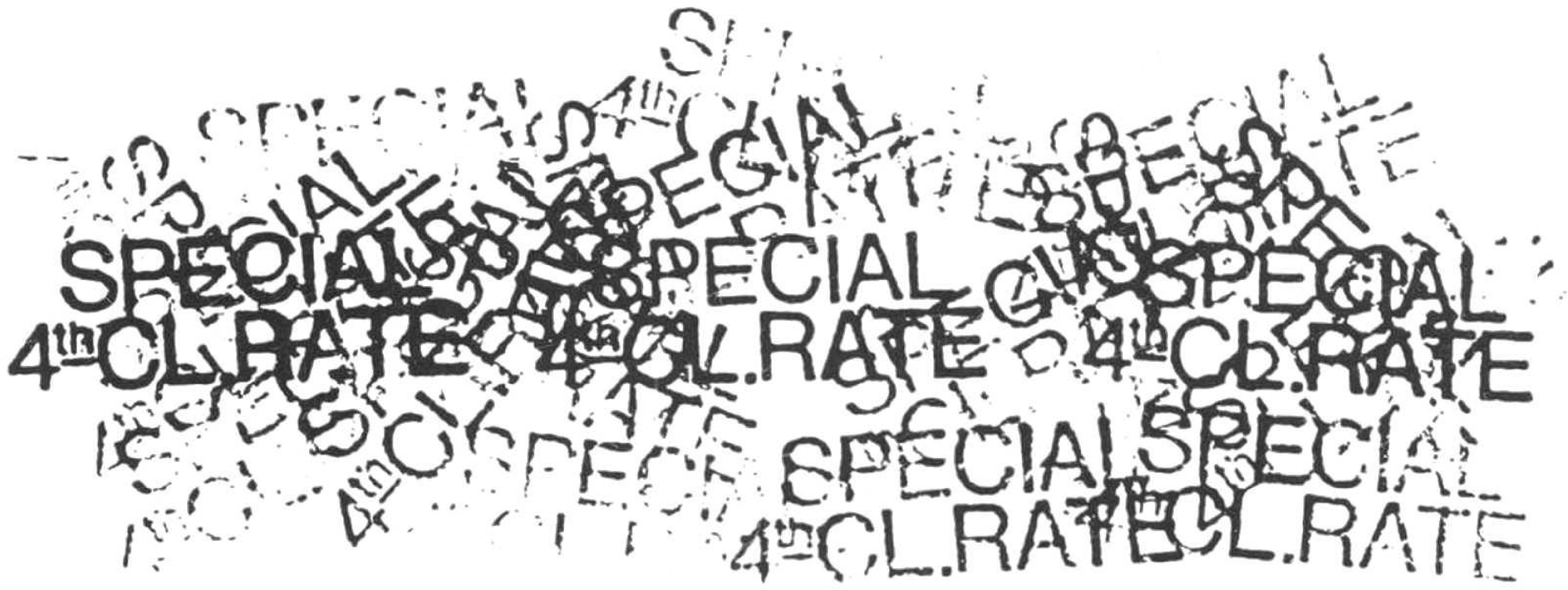
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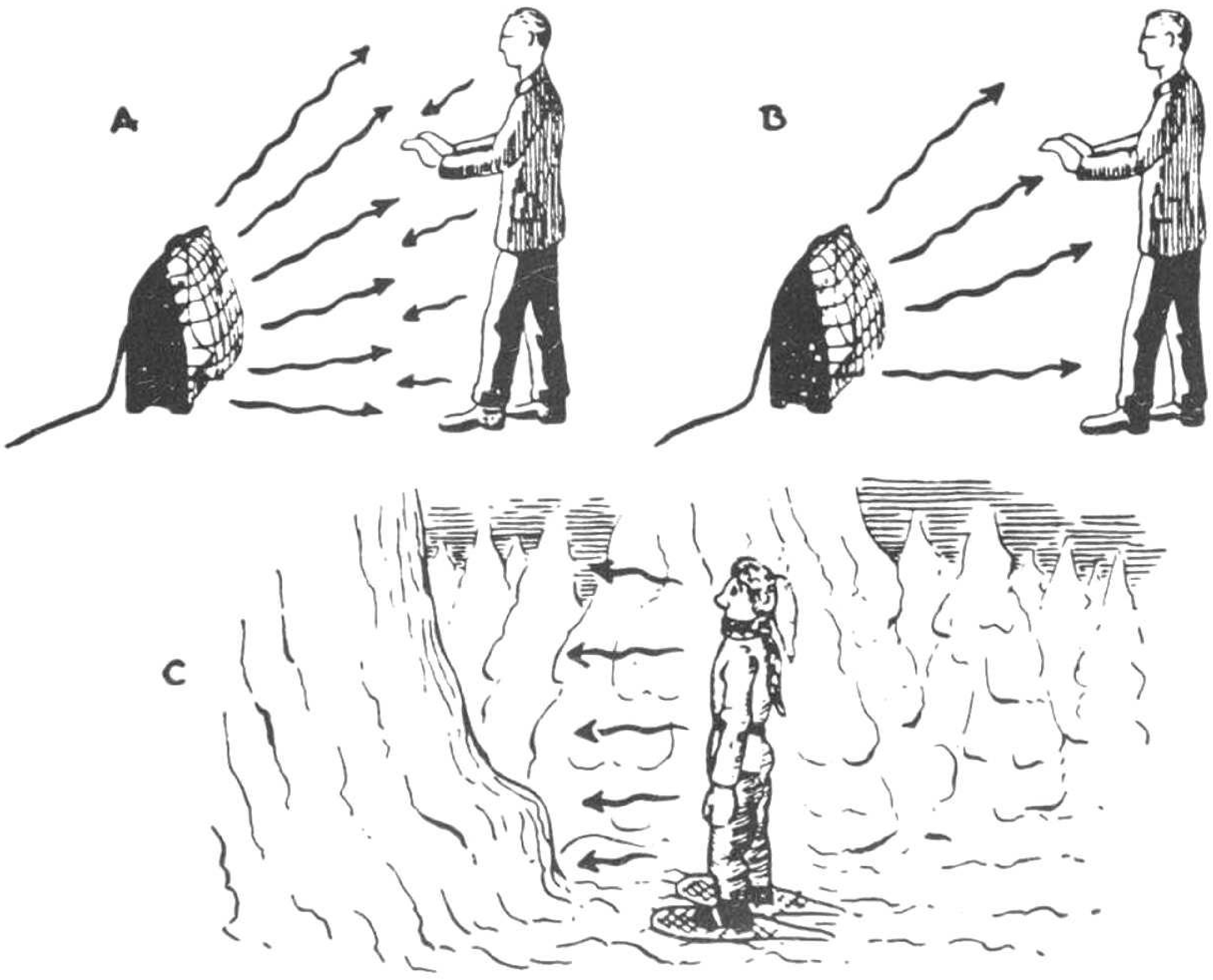

A
B
C

10.

If printing was the mechanization of writing, the telegraph was the electrification of writing. If the movie was the mechanization of movement and gesture, TV is the electronification of the same. Each of these steps in making more explicit an earlier technology modifies all other media. The newspaper changed poetic technique, the movie modified the novel, and TV changed the movie. The telegraph gave us diplomacy without walls as the motorcar gave us the home without walls. But perhaps all these matters and many

11.

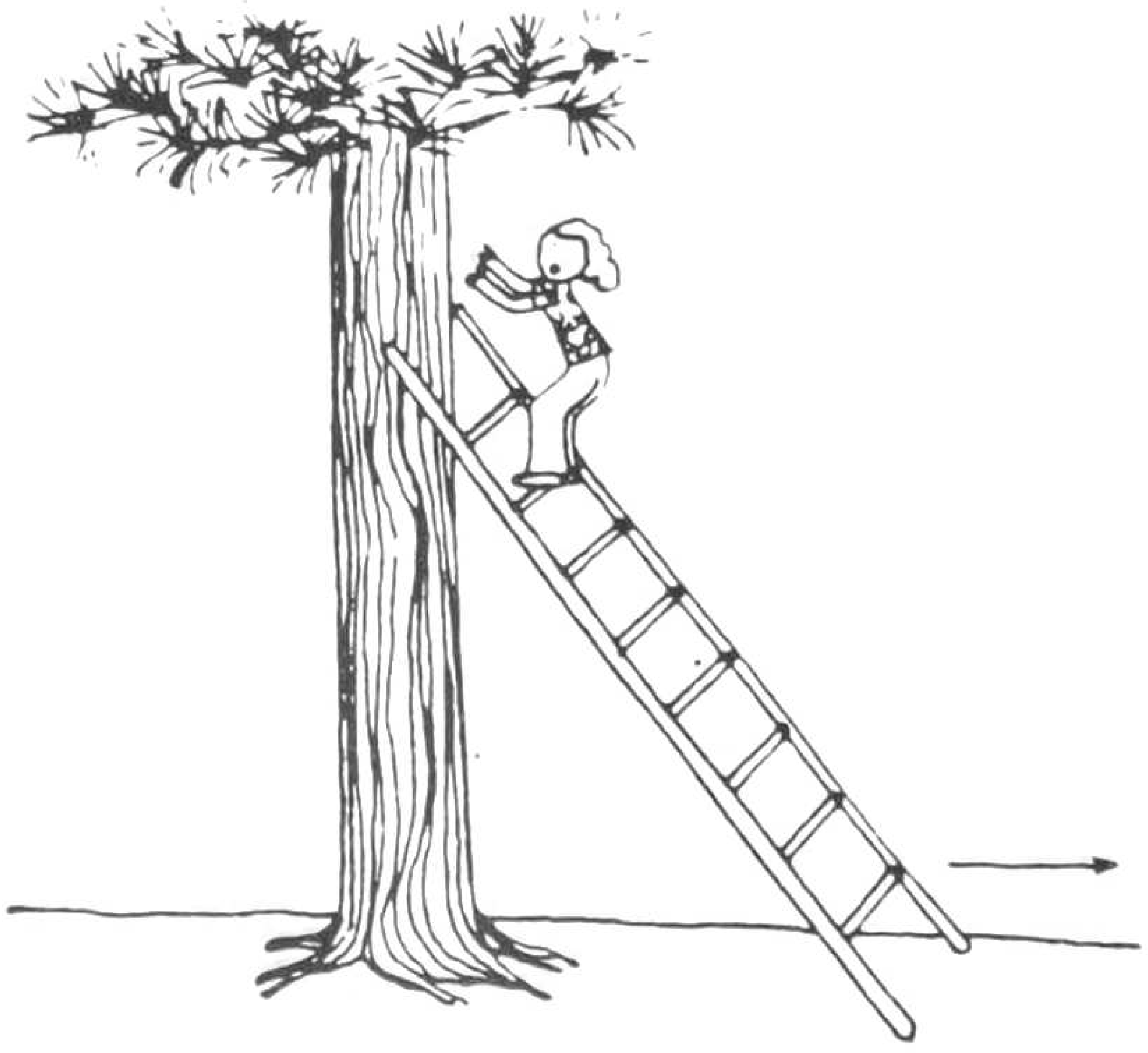
ıerine Allegret. Amia-
eoccupation with sex;
ner starts selling porno
ncreasingly fascinated
well done; rated X
lid (yet unsensational)

l14m. ***½ D: George
, Mitzi Gaynor, Kay
Jacques Bergerac, Les-
aniell, Patrick Macnee.
musical involving three
flashback) reveal their
fer Kelly; chicly han-

trician Bjornstrand, happily married for 15 years to Dahlbeck, has an affair with a patient; Dahlbeck then returns to *her* former lover—the husband's best friend. Medium Bergman.▼

Less Than Zero (1987) **C-96m.** ** D: Marek Kanievska. Andrew McCarthy, Jami Gertz, Robert Downey, Jr., James Spader, Tony Bill, Nicholas Pryor. Bret Easton Ellis' nihilistic novel about young, disengaged L.A. have-it-alls is sanitized into pointlessness, though a wholly faithful adaptation would have no doubt turned off

12.



JULIANA SPAHR

SHOOTING IN THE WAY WE HAD TO SHOOT, I JUST DON'T KNOW . . .

It is clear that reality, in all its facets, is expressed in each: it
the enormous number of words said every morning, noon, and night
speaks to those present (to be present is to take part, because
reality is dead and thrown back upon the past, where it is gathered or collected into an idea
reality speaks only through itself): it speaks its own language,
when they remember them, shed a tear
which is the language of action: a gun shot, more gun shots, a
there is no better way of not compromising oneself and living peacefully, thinking only of
body falls, a car stops, a woman screams, the crowd
tomorrow, than by using words to destroy time
shouts ....All these nonsymbolic signs indicate that something
reality seen and heard as it happens always in the present tense
happened: the death of a president, here and now, in the
reality is constituted by nothing other than its illusion
present. And that present, I repeat, is the tense of the various
against the chest of drawers in the wretched little bedroom my brother and I shared
subjective long takes, shot from various points of view where
but where have I got to?
witnesses happened to be with their organs or instruments.

THE STATE OF MIND NECESSARY FOR AESTHETICISM (THE CONTEMPLATIVE AND
SLIGHTLY LAZY TASTE FOR BEAUTY) AND FOR HUMOUR (THE DESIRE
TO GO ON SMILING THOUGH OUR EYES BE FULL OF ANGUISH) IN MOROCCO, WHEN

Source: Pasolini, "Why That of Oedipus is a Story" and "Observations on the Long Take"

It Looks Like a Real House

establish a flexibility so we are not immobile
Thus the grip of realism has found
a picture chosen to cover the space
occupied by another picture

like a sequence in which a car

moves over ruptured roads and slices

into ghost veins of color—

a camera follows each turn,

examines the exits where rock protects

a visionary tool that prods it:—

A severe distance is established between her realism
and his anxious attempt to define it.

Source: Guest, *Fair Realism*

REMEMBERING STORIES AFTER HEARING THEM AGAIN

fingers on the one side thumb on the other flattened against the glass to
lift it up to one's mouth is a space that is without.
If it is the frame if it is the cosmology if it is the myth if it is the tale
then this space where ones hand reaches out

I seal the letter, press the stamp against my tongue.
light will help
He in the dream is hanging out laundry.
one to see
It spells words I cannot read.
but not to know
Words can write time, can write the flow of the river.
reaching out for
The lilt in her voice sounds English at the end of the sentence.
what matters reach
I feel I cannot hear through his image of me.
out to touch the
His words mean.
smooth cheek of
The writing is spidery on the page.
person next to me
Her name catches my eye each time
this person flinches
I look.

can I exhibit pain as I can exhibit red carefulness is a most essential part of this picture because you are sitting at a loom tokens of sudden understanding destroy nothing but a house of cards does that mean he is careful?

AT ALL COSTS I WILL GET TO THAT HOUSE

Source: **Wittgenstein,** *Philosophical Investigations*

CAROL STETSER

The Color of Three

Language art, lettrisme, concrete poems, pattern poems, and visual poetry are all names for art about language; language provides both the form and the content for this mode of art production. Although I spoke a language before I ever made art, I studied the history, sociology, and techniques of art before I made any comparable studies of language. Language was just something I used and never thought much about.

Ten years ago Karl Kempton sent me an issue of his publication, *Kaldron*. I found its pages of visual poetry totally incomprehensible. Tentatively, I sent him some photographs of petroglyphs, to which he responded with interest. But several years and issues of *Kaldron* had to pass before visual poetry became comprehensible to me, and I began to create my own language art.

My home in the Mohave desert provided the foundation for my visual poetry. Here the past permeates the present. The walls and floors of the cabins in town were lined with yellowed newspapers from the mining heyday of the 1920s. My pantry drawers were old dynamite crates covered with black stenciled letters. In the nearby desert canyons, Indians had left indecipherable pictographs and petroglyphs on the boulders. The combination in my prints of contemporary visual symbols with the rock art of the past is a reflection of my environment as well as my philosophical belief in the theories of relativity and simultaneity.

I had gained an appreciation of the beauty inherent in the forms of letters and recognized the decorative potential of language in pattern and design during the seventies when I saw the magnificent Islamic calligraphy adorning the mosques of Turkey and Iran. In the same decade the study of meditation with a Tibetan Buddhist teacher and the resultant exposure to mantras introduced me to the link between language and metaphysical truths. Eventually I realized that a letter of the alphabet, for example the letter "A", could be as potent a symbol as a circle or a cross. I began collecting symbols – sacred symbols – from art and anthropology books, from newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and junk mail, to use in the collages I call "Hierograms".

Life without symbols is inconceivable. It is the act of symbolizing that distinguishes us from other animals. Without symbols there can be no thought. We think in a particular language, and our language consists of symbols. "Since we constantly think we really dwell within language." (James Powell)

Spoken words are symbols of objects and thoughts; written words are symbols of our speech, or symbols of symbols. Language is all-pervasive; every dealing we have with others involves language. We use language as a tool of communication; it is the repository of our knowledge, of the cultures of those who lived before us, and the means by which our accumulated experience will be passed on to the generations that follow. The history, culture, and traditions of a people are contained in their language. The study of a language reveals a people's characteristics, how they regard life, what is important to them.

Language is important not only because it conveys our thoughts, but also because it shapes them. Our view of the universe is inherent in the structure of our language. Our grammar and vocabulary determine whether phenomena are seen as continuous events or as objects. The rigid sense of time intrinsic to Western culture is directly related to and enforced by the structure of our verbs. Naming a thing gives it a birth certificate; without a name there is no existence. Language sets the boundaries of our lives. We are duped by our symbols.

Now we are bombarded daily with symbols, not only from the printed page but from radio, television, and computers. These media present us with forceful new languages that should be studied to understand how they work to affect our perceptions. We must become aware of the tremendous influence that language has on us, and also understand the relation between words and what they stand for.

The role of today's visual poet is to carry on in the tradition of the Indian vedic poets, the zen buddhists, poets Chuang Tzu and William Blake, and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who each attempted to explode our familiar language patterns so we can see clearly and directly. Only then can we recognize the limits imposed by language. We artists must expose the falsity of the analytical, linear worldview that our language enforces. Visual poetry can provide the jolt necessary for us to cut through the conceptualizations of language and to experience the transcendence of The Word.

"What is the color of the number three?" (Wittgenstein)

December, 1991

MARCEL STÜSSI

1. The sense of look is more with the eyes directly, than as an internal reflex.

2. I know not, what, which is the pure / clear, genuine visual poetry – only. I'm tolerant and extensive in this kind.

3. Maybe the typical character is – it's common – ? – mean, I think), if the work is figurative (visualized) with letters, this is the intersection realistic, but it is not for me striking.

4. Only partially of my works, I do also write and also paint (and make also experimental movies).

5. Kurt Schwitters, Man Ray . . . . Shigeru Tamaru . . . . Mogens Otto Nielsen

6. The International Shadows Project: Hiroshima and Dallas in 1988, Milwaukee in 1990, Calexico CA in 1989, Kenosha WI in 1991.
VISUALOG 3, edited by Karl Kempton (Halcyon CA) in 1990.
The International Visual Poetry Exhibition, edited by Spence and Cortese (Melbourne, Australia) in 1991.

7. The visitors to the exhibitions and shows.

8. Exhibitions, gallery shows, experimental and alternative publications, and also personal contacts with people by mail.

9.a. This is not possible, because the technical is not historical (copies!)

9.b. YES.

9.c. Also YES.

It is clear, the situation of diffusion and contribution as science defines the sense of make works (with exceptions).

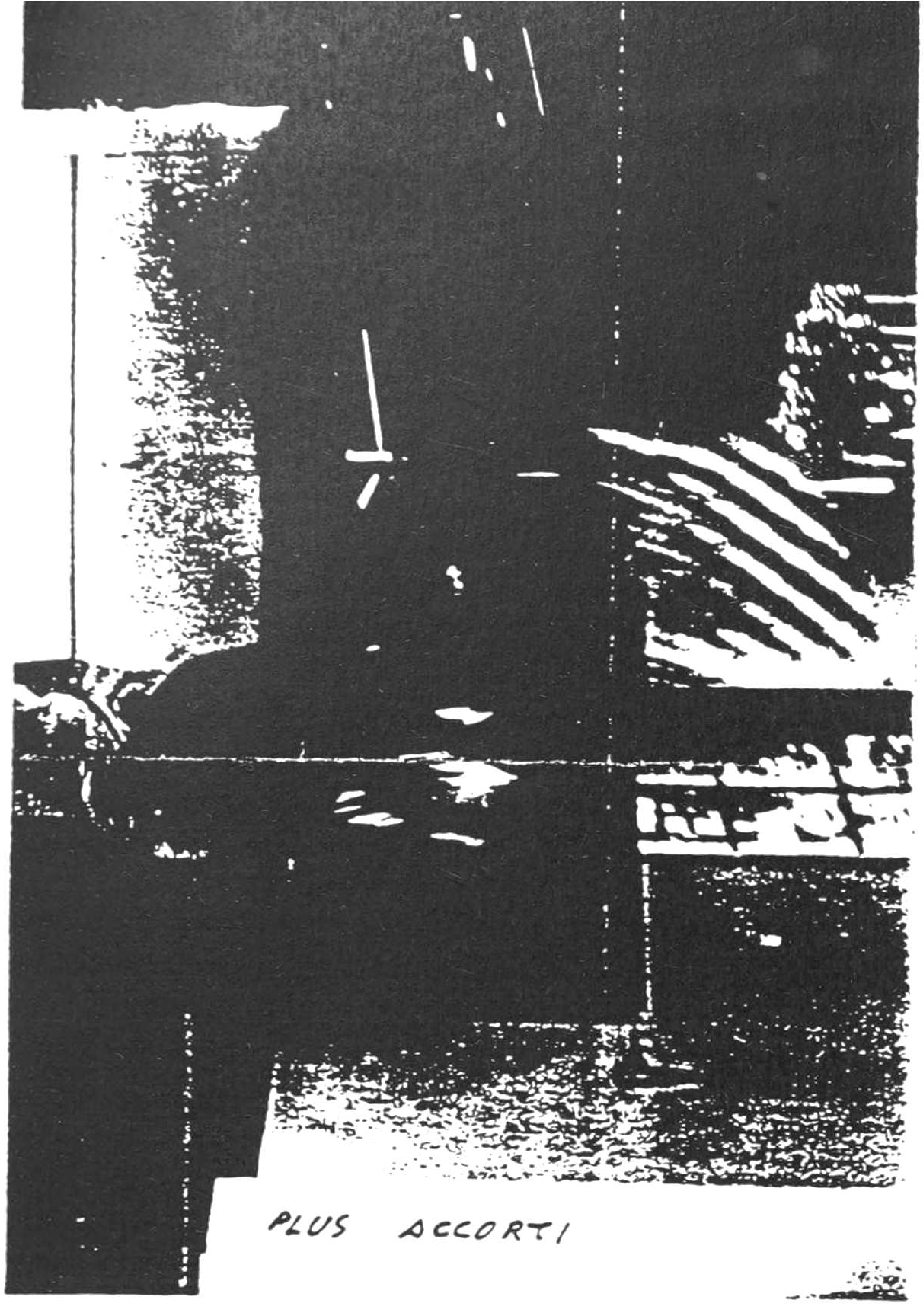
In Middle Ages = Woodcuts / letterpress printing

Today = Photostatic copies

10. It is for me a non-commercial activity / occupation, BUT with function of flank for my works of / in painting and writing. All world is over and this with pleasure . . . joy.

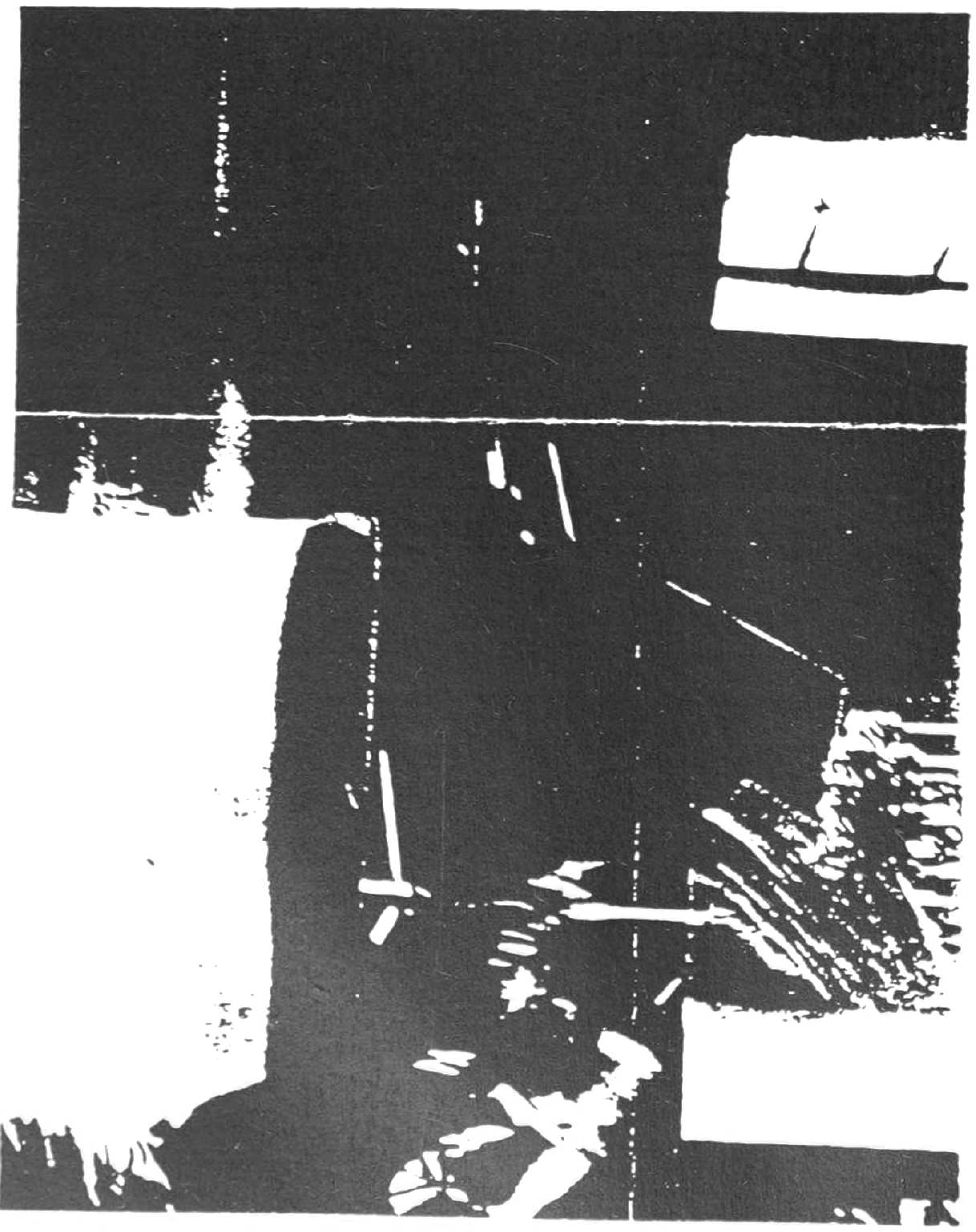
11. Sorry, by all of explanations beforehand, I can not living by visual poetry (only imaginary), ON THE CONTRARY, it is investments as income.

12. Wherefore NOT, yes why not, by both of them, especially exhibitions and publications diffusions, catalogues, etc.



E ZERSCHLAGUNG DES / EINES SCHACHBREETES, diese ... SEINE / EINE ...zerschlagung des BRETTES. Datier

Marcel DU ... Stüssi à ALTE KIRCHE Stiftung Künstlerhaus in Boswil Suiss



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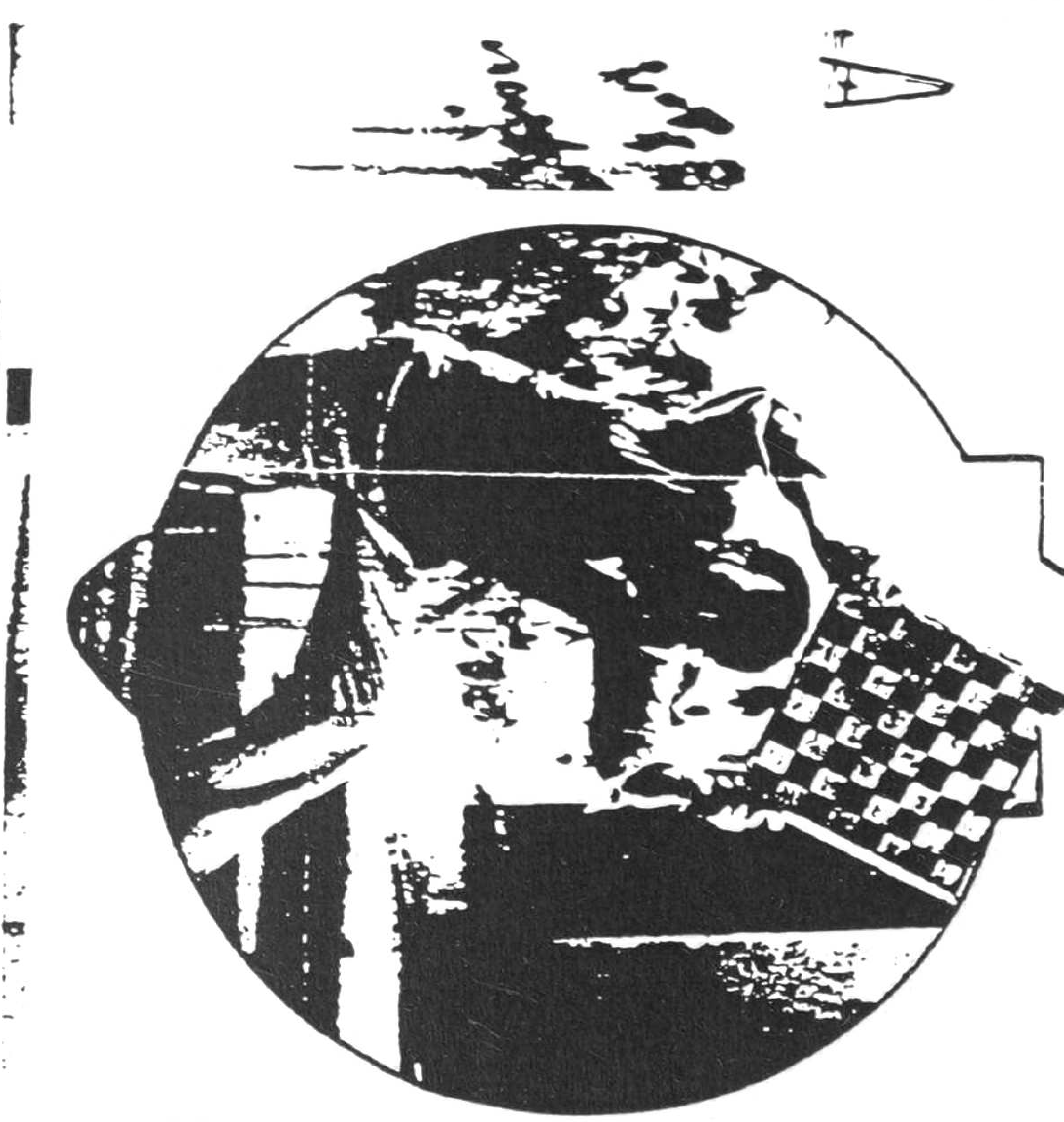
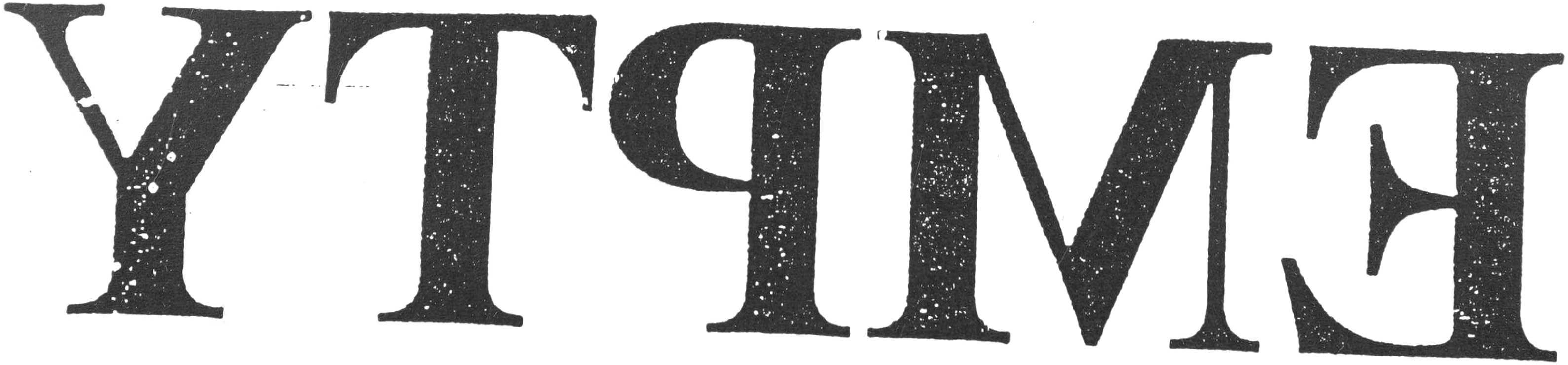


Said once
toward ropes
are thrown
all to the
elements made
one or the other
What passes on
into the ether
is heat or the
opposite entry
into
some other
world
from the
beginnings of
your head
went out and
made into these
arrows
of morning are
the bending
times
you spoke about
into something
new
or outer The
thrust of intent
is
still clear
enough to

The thought before the fact lays out its own fact.
Vincent Ferrini, Jan 91

Foremost among senders flashing motors elate forward

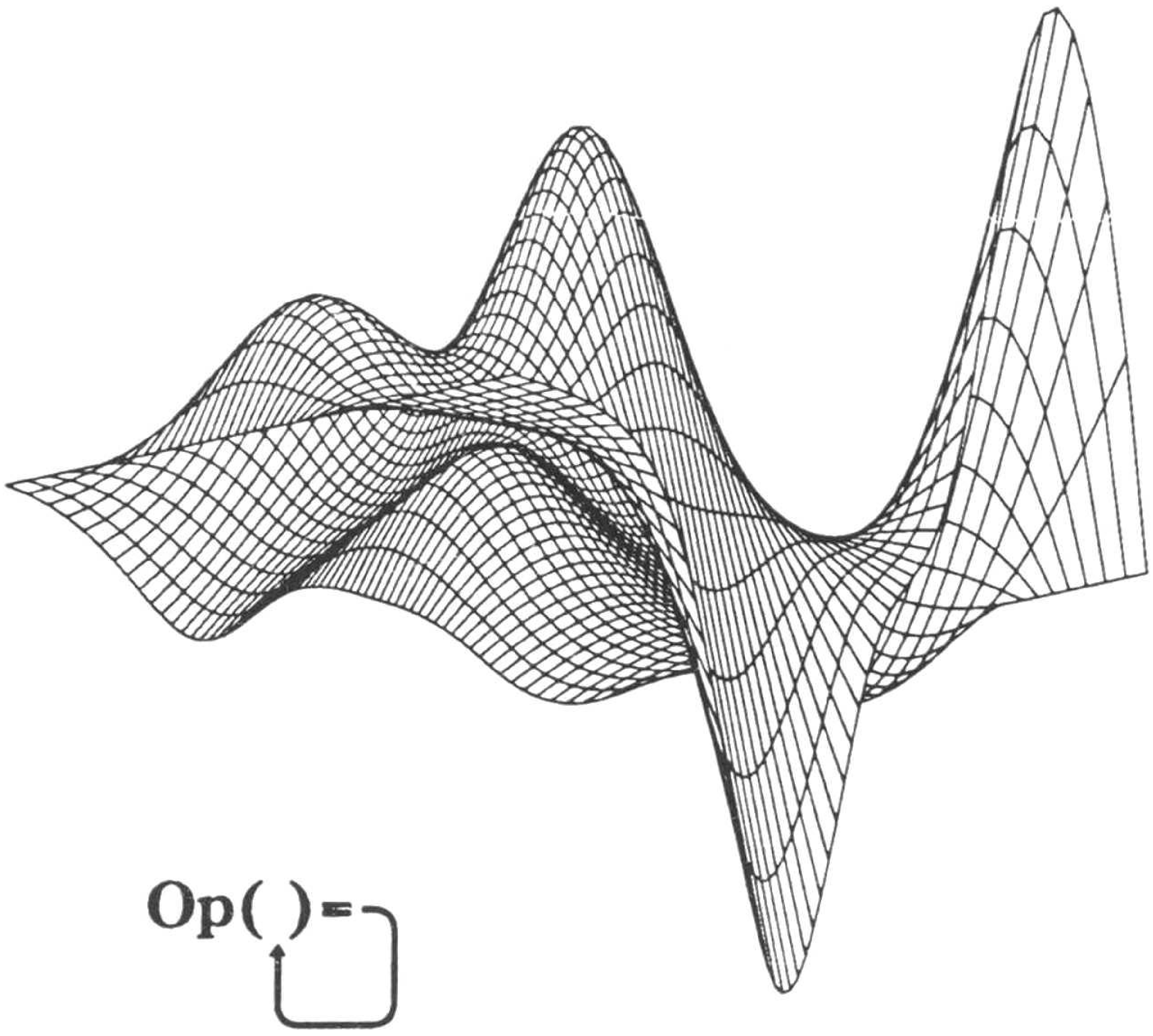


ANDRÉ VALLIAS

B雨STOR'MING
FOR CORE CONCERNING CON TEMPORARY VISUAL POETRY

(I too dislike it)

out of the wordwomb
no verse nor universe
poems crawl & build
diverseness



Op( )=

ways of constructing self
consciously dynamic inter
active non-trivial ways of

to be written
down
off
out
?
to be read
out
off
into
?
to seem
and be seen
?
rid
of readwrite
heads
¡
eyefully
over
seeing
visual
poetry
nothing
but
poetry
perceivable
percipient
poiesis
made of making

language
rouse of being

proteus' epistemological pleasure

ANDRÉ VALLIAS 1992

ELIZABETH WAS

1. The back and forth required/inspired by and between the eye, the mind, the emotions, the intellect, the connotative membrane, even the sexual organs.

2. One might compare the differences between poetry and, say, nonfictional narrative: most poetry is more ambiguous, leaves things unsaid, more open to interpretation, more emotional, less linear, etc., than nonfictional narrative. So too, visual poetry juxtaposes images in a more ambiguous way than straight imagery (for example, undoctored photography), leaves things unsaid, more open to interpretation, more emotional, less linear, etc. Much of my visual work actually incorporates words, alphabets, parts thereof, or other semiotic or hieroglyphic forms, which are more obvious "literary signifiers". And no, I notice no gaps or contradictions in thinking the notion "visual poetry", but that's a good question.

3. Connotative, associative, referential and even representational meanings communicated by language still inhere in visual poetry, as do elicitation of emotion of all kinds. Meaning of all kinds which is communicated by visual art – especially by abstract and impressionistic art – is/can be communicated in visual poetry. To say any more would be to spout art theory; I hate art theory.

4. Most. Even those unpublished all-text "manuscripts" sleeping in my file drawers will not see the published light of day until they are given visual life via creative fontography and/or imagery super- or juxtaposed.

5. Miekal And, Crag Hill, Bob Cobbing, Clemente Padin, and others . . .

6. Yes. Perhaps I can call it a "xexoxial endarchy", whereby our mailbox radiates outward and inward to disseminate and receive visual poetry on a regular basis, like food and nourishment. In fact, our publishing and other efforts have helped to form a community of visual poets, as has Score Publications, Kaldron, and NRG magazines, and several others during the past ten years, via an international network/web of "underground" (non-commercial) non-conventional and experimental artists and writers which has been gradually evolving.

7. The various sundry ever-changing mostly expanding group of individuals who make up the network described above. Also important collectors of visual poetry, such as Ruth and Marvin Sackner in Miami Beach, Florida, and Barbara Moore, Fluxus collector in New York. Also, youth and others who find out about us through magazines and fanzines which reprint and disseminate information about similar organizations and publishers.

8. Our own experimental publications and experimental magazines (especially *Xerolage*), other publications and magazines which publish our work, mail art shows, our own gallery shows and occasional attendance at small press bookfairs.

9.a. There is a rich historical tradition of visual poetry forms, including but certainly not limited to illuminated manuscripts. See Dick Higgins' work(s?) on the subject.

9.b. It is the logical metamorphosis of contemporary poetry. Nature poetry has got to die with man's abuse of the natural world. Parts of newspapers and other print are littered in the grasses, everywhere visual and literary forms are merging, voluntarily or otherwise. People are (ah, finally!) bored with old pure forms, and their new interest in hydrids is aided by the user-friendly intermedia nature of the computer age, rock and roll also helped make everyone a poet, and MTV has added the elements of visual interplay and collage to that.

9.c. The corporate commercial world has always used visual poetry to sell its ideas or its products, from creation and use of logos, to media advertising of all kinds. Now in the electronic age anyone can use visual poetry and print for their own devices. This is a powerful socio-economic and even political development. Hypermedia may well be the sum and substance of the next revolution; in fact it's already begun!

10. Visual poetry brings life to text. It grows hairs on text, it sprouts green shoots from gray pages. It tears down the walls between the academic departments, and even between academia and the outside world. By the time the average person has a computer with graphic capabilities in his/her own home, socio-economic and other barriers will be broken down as well. The full benefits of visual poetry have yet to be developed: one can imagine whole reforestations in the shapes of letters, collective get-togethers engendering visual/verbal rituals, dictionaries of visual imagery, visual/verbal berlitz centers, ideas form and melt upward out of the sides of my head as I type . . .

11. Not enough, maybe 1%. But Xexoxial Endarchy has been breaking even for over five years now, and that I suppose is a financial achievement in and of itself. At least I am not losing money doing art (except insofar as my labor is unpaid).

12. Sure, but first all the old boys and girls who sit on most governmental grant-giving cultural boards must either be replaced by new blood or re-educated. That would start with teaching them that forms like visual poetry exist in the first place, and then teaching them what these forms involve and their value.

Elizabeth Was is co-publisher, editor, founder, director, and bookmaker (with Miekal And) of Xexoxial Endarchy, Ltd, a tax-exempt multi-arts organization dedicated to creating, promoting, disseminating, and teaching about experimental, intermedia, and hybrid art and literary forms like visual/verbal literature.

DON WELLMAN

Sorry but I cannot respond to your CORE questionnaire, in anything like an orderly or rational fashion. The first question stopped me dead, for a variety of compelling theoretical reasons. Questions 11 and 12 strike me as obnoxious. 11 reminds me of a Food Stamps application. Answers to 12 can only play into the hands of neoconservative, anti-art political factions. To subsidize art is to buy art – howsoever the contract be written. Anarchico-artists may freely spend, whatever comes, but render no accounts.

TRY THIS:

visual language washes over us, anesthetizing us daily – AESTHETIC EFFECT: a psychedelic blimp floats over high sierras, a bunch of naked "babes," all blond and long-legged, cavort, simulating pleasure, stimulating belly-rubbing bourgeois EX-JOCK MALE zombies in floating bar room – CANNOT CARVE (crave) poetry outta this wash. CANNOT RECLAIM VISUAL LANGUAGE. cannot return to the age of caves or ideograms or chinese acting.

When the space of performance: stage, page is integral to concept – a purist definition of visual language – result: pattern poems, concrete poetry, formalisms of all sorts, risk of neo-Platonic, fervid mystico-fascisms.

When visual language undercuts, forms ironic intertext with (politicized, commercialized, canonized) main-stream – result: visual poetry, *poesia visiva*. Amerenglish LACKS some necessary thought rhymes: *vise, vice. DIVISIVE DIVIDING DEVICES* – "visual" sounds too much like "casual" – thinks too much like holistic consciousness massage.

Visual discourse, DIALOG, dialectic, transvaluations, sporting the label "poetic" (avoid all "cute-isms" of revery: art is art if made for a gallery, poetry poetry if published in a lit mag) DO NOT OPERATE without informed audience. From the moment of birth, visual language saturates visual consciousness (un-, pre-, post-). Visual work to claim "poetic" status, with integrity, must TODAY reflect (*flexus*, fluxus, *inflect*, INFECT), the ready-made VISUAL sphere, WILL contain a verbal element that reverberates: knotting, threading, colliding in SPACE.

REPEAT: visual poetry is the process of revealing the ready-made visual components that the audience carries within itself, but does not recognize until the moment of exposure to the work. WILD, UNFETTERED, ANARCHICO, EROTIC PLAY, doodling vortical, surreal alphabeastieries.

Visual theorists generate thought pictures more rapidly than essentialist verbalists. Quick, comprehensive visual awareness, suspends NEXT, NEXT, NEXT, all linear word constipations. None of this is new. If you know a bit about it you might teach, promote, write reference books, build museums and mind the gourmet restaurant bookstore galleries. There is no pay scale or fair p(L)ay for creators, but people buy copies, and visual poetry has the advantage of being cheaply reproducible.

Rest assured, MOM, every word above meets someone's expectations.

THE END

KARL YOUNG

1. We don't, at the moment, have a good working definition of visual poetry. Perhaps a discussion like this will help. The name visual poetry has been used partly to dissociate both current and ancient modes from the concrete poetry of the 60s. Most poeple using the name have limited it to work that can be printed in standard books and magazines. But what about such related movements as mail art and book art? Should they be considered part of visual poetry? I don't think you could formulate a sensible definition of contemporary visual poetry that doesn't include these two related movements. I am involved in all three, and I'm by no means alone in that. It's often difficult to say when one activity ends and another begins, and, for myself, I don't see any need to make distinctions while working. But this lack of definition can cause significant problems in discussion. See particularly my answer to #7.

Okay, let me try a succinct definition:

Visual poetry is a type of poetry that depends to a significant degree on its visual form. It cannot be fully understood if read aloud to someone who can't see it, no matter how many times it is read, or how it is read, or explained or glossed.

Unfortunately, this means it is an art inaccessible to blind people. It may, however, be a type of poetry which deaf people can appreciate and compose. The deaf have been denied access to phonetic based poetry, but their visual acuity and appreciation of gesture is highly developed. Perhaps Peter Cook and Kenney Lerner's *Flying Words Project*, and other performance art forms by deaf poets are some of the most advanced forms of visual poetry now going.

Visual poetry has been around as long as humanoids have been making marks on things: paintings on cave walls that have a grammatic structure, temple inscriptions copied onto flexible surfaces that could be folded up for compact storage or transportation, poems and even musical notation arranged to imitate an object (such as a bird, a fish, a cross, a horse) or represent a geometrical shape (such as a circle, a spiral, a triangle), and so on. Some writing systems such as Chinese have leant themselves to this more than others.

There are three basic types of visual poetry: mimetic (poems that look like birds or horses); gestural (poems that imitate gestures – this is particularly important in some periods of the history of Chinese calligraphy; I have done quite a bit with it, particularly in books like *Cried and Measured* and in *Clouds Over Fortjade*); schematic (poems that repeat letters or words along an axis or follow some similar scheme). These are not exclusive categories: the medieval Latin Carmina Figurata, for instance, combine the mimetic and the schematic.

Although visual poetry is not dependent on a phonetic base, it can include all sorts of sound patterns and possibilities. Although visual properties are the essence of visual poetry, this does not in any way restrict possibilities for vocalization or other realization in sound.

2,3,9. These cannot be answered with sufficient brevity here. I'll refer the reader to my book of essays, *Only As Painted Images In Your Books Have We Come To Be Alive In This Place*, scheduled for publication in the summer of 1992 by Chax Press. It's a couple hundred pages long, and only deals with preliminaries.

As to gaps and contradictions: no, I don't feel any.

4. I can't quantify this, particularly since I've opened the question whether or not book art and mail art can be included. If they can, over half my work is visual poetry; if not, it's considerably less. I have periods when I am active, and usually work in several modes simultaneously, extending from conventional lyric poetry through visual poetry, book art, process poems, and anything else I can devise or recombine. I sometimes work out ideas for visual poetry and book art in fallow periods. That is: I get the ideas for things during active periods, make notes and sketches then, and make the books or work out the details on paper at times when new ideas are not coming to me.

5. Given the current milieu, in which poetry is a participatory rather than a spectator art, with a relatively large number of participants; and given the tremendous access we now have to previous epochs; this is a difficult question to answer. Given the further fact that canon formation, at present, is nothing more than a tool for exploitation, I certainly wouldn't want to do anything to cooperate with such tendencies. I've thought of several ways to answer this question, and here's what I've decided to do: make two lists, one for the past, one for contemporaries. The first is a list of 50 genres and artists who have been important to me. Some are not by any stretch of the imagination visual poets. In some cases the distinction between past and present is a perceived one, rather than one based on dates. The second is a list of 150 contemporaries. I've limited this to visual poets, mail artists, and book artists. These are simply off-the-top-of-my-head lists; each could be at least three times longer than it is.

THE PAST:

The mural painters at Teotihuacan (and their 20th century descendants, Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros); the pre-Columbian and early colonial Central Mexican manuscript painters; Maya glyph inscriptions (more so than their painted manuscripts); Chinese calligraphers (the more restrained hands have been more important to me – good luck with grass script and other cursive hands); Inca quipus; Japanese Yukio-e prints; Buddhist landscape painting (primarily Chinese and Japanese; the earlier, the better); Hiberno-Saxon book illumination; Tangram figures; mandalas (all types); Kabbalistic Sephiroth; Indus Valley script; Hopi sand painting as used in ceremonies such as the Great Star Chant or the Shooting Chant; Channel School book illumination; Hildegard of Bingen; Persian and Mogul manuscript painting; hermetic diagrams done under Robert Fludd's directions; Qwakiutl ceremonial gear: masks, that open in stages, totem poles, sculptural programs on buildings, etc.; Plan of Ficcino's Memory Theater; Dogon cosmological diagrams, as drawn by Europeans and as worked out in buildings and utilitarian objects; William Blake; Huichol String painting; William Morris; Marcel Duchamp; Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven; Ezra Pound; Pablo Neruda; Paul Klee; Wassily Kandinsky; Khlebnikov; Peter Kropotkin; Hugo Ball; Stuart Davis; Franz Kline; Ingmar Bergman; Harry Crosby; Max Ernst; Georgia O'Keefe; Bob Brown; Ralph Eugene Meatyard; Laszlo Moholy-Nagy; Abraham Lincoln Gillespie; Guillaume Apollinaire; Kurt Schwitters; Ad Reinhardt; Kenneth Patchen; Harry Partch.

THE PRESENT:

Jackson Mac Low; Jerome Rothenberg; Seiichi Niikuni; Adele Aldrige; José Luis Castillejo; Emmett Williams; bill bissett; Thomas A. Clark; Clemente Padin; Mayumi Handa; Robert Lax; Mukata Takamura; Shoji Yoshizawa; Marilyn Rosenberg; Hans Braumuller; Dick Higgins; Tom Phillips; Caren Heft; Ake Hodell; David Meltzer; Hugo Pontes; Sigeru Nakayama; John Cage; Angela & Henning Mittendorf; Robert Rauschenberg; Kowa Kato; Phil Corner; Gerard Barbot; Barry & Eve Pilcher; jw curry; Michel Pollard; David UU; Childe Roland; Hassan Massoudy; Mako Sakoda; Serge Segay; Roberto Marchi; Franco Vallone; John Martone; Shozo Shimamoto; John M. Bennett;

Geoffrey Cook; Ronald Johnson; Guillermo Deisler; Paula Hocks; Constantin Xenakis; Eugene Gomringer; Ron Silliman; Wally Depew; Ana Aly; Sergio Burquez; Aram Saroyan; Crag Hill; Robert Indiana; Bill Keith; Edgard Braga; Rodrigo Muñoz; Charles Alexander; John Brandi; Kjell Nyman; Ruth Wulf-Rehfeldt; Décio Pignatari; Rea Vikonova; Shurato Mukai; Fernando Aguiar; R. Prost; Ana Hatherly; Bruno Cappati; Carlo Belloli; Ko De Jonge; Tetsuya Fukui; Carol Stetser; Kazuyoshi Takeishi; Alexandra Holownia; Valeria Randolfini; Ciro Beltran; Ruth Miles; Vaclav Havel; Steve Nelson-Raney; Ferdinand Kriwet; Robin Crozier; Ikuo Mori; Tamotsu Watanabe; Bruce Andrews; John Furnival; Suzanne Rosenblatt; Bernard Heidsiek; Bern Porter; David Arnold; George Brecht; Tomoko Miyajima; Ruggero Maggi; Shohachiro Takahashi; Kathy Kuehn; Dom Sylvester Houédard; Robert Grenier; Cesar Espinosa; Bob Cobbing; Bob Grumman; Claus Bremer; Michael Josepf Phillips; Lotte Rosenkilde Hansen; Bliem Kern; Ilmar Kruusame; Alison Knowles; Stephen Bann; Edith Kallman; Torbjorn Lime; Karen Shaw; Joel Lipman; Michael And & Liz Was; Hideo Kajino; Michael Winkler; Hiroshi Tanabu; Hiroo Kamimura; Noboru Izumi; Loris Essary; Haroldo de Campos; Augusto de Campos; Pauline Oliveros; Betty Danon; Giulia Niccolai; Diter Roth; Richard Kostelanetz; Walter Tisdale; Jean Francois Bory; Kitasono Katue; John Held, Jr.; Ian Hamilton Finlay; Hansjorg Mayer; Franz Mon; David Cole; Pedro Xisto; Thalia; Alina McDonald; Raimondo Cortese; Ruth Cowen; Avajo; Pete Spence; Manfred Mohr; bpNichol; Karl Gartung & Anne Kingsbury; Harry Polkinhorn; Karl Kempton; Sherry Reniker.

TEN NONART SOURCES, ALL OF WHICH CAN BE READ:

Microscope photos of organic cells; electron micrographs, particularly of crystalline formations; topographical photos of the earth from space (particularly when computer enhanced); astronomical photographs of all sorts; the night sky, seen unaided, when visibility is clear enough to see more than the brightest stars; electronic circuit boards; designs of microchips; wrecked cars and other damaged and distorted industrial products in junkyards (this is not a Luddite statement – just a reflection of interest in shapes and surfaces); wind and wave patterns on beaches and other sandy grounds; animal tracks in snow; models of DNA.

6. No. I have a number of friends who I am in touch with by telephone and letter and occasional visits. Ongoing conversation with them about visual poetry is very important to me. But they don't make up a community.

I am now living in a town that has no literary or artistic community worth participating in (I do have one artist friend here, but a community of two doesn't seem a community, and I don't see her all that often anyway). For many years I lived in Milwaukee, a city which had what is to my mind nearly an ideal literary community. Although I was the only visual poet who spent more than a year or two there, community life was particularly important to me. Emphases shifted through the 20 some years I lived in the city. Two organizations, the Water Street Arts Center and its heir, Woodland Pattern, were particularly important in bringing people together and in bringing other poets and artists to the city. I am no longer part of this community – though I have stayed in touch with a couple people in it. This community is apparently still healthy, though it has gone through some major changes since I left.

There are many people with whom I share a deep friendship who do not live nearby. Most are not visual poets. My conversations with them give me something like a sense of community, though this is a false sense: this association can't be considered a real community, since a lot of the people involved don't know each other or aren't in regular contact.

It seems more important to me to have a sense of community with other artists working in various modes (even when that means getting into aesthetic squabbles with them) than it is being part of a community devoted solely to visual poetry. In fact, such a community in isolation sounds a bit nightmarish.

In curating mail art shows, I find a lot of excellent work coming from Australia. There is some suggestion in the work that the Australians who have participated know each other. I have tried to strike up correspondence with some of them, but they are apparently not interested in communicating with me. I've requested information on magazines and anthologies from Australia, but, again, I haven't received answers. Now if these people aren't in touch with each other, there must be something pretty strange in the water or the air in their part of the world. My impression, however, is that they have the most active visual poetry scene in the world at the moment, and they may be the ones to ask about communities of visual poets.

7. Okay, the question that gives me a chance to write a bit about what to include and exclude when discussing visual poetry. If by visual poetry you mean traditional visual poetry, made in two dimensions to be presented in books and magazines, my audience is simply limited to people interested in visual poetry. That's probably not a lot of people. A lot of these people I know or know of (though I am sometimes surprised at the people who have seen things of mine or even own my books). Book art may reach a larger or more diverse audience – it's hard to say since most shows I've been in have been held elsewhere and I have just put books in boxes and sent them off to someplace or other. Sometimes something sells; sometimes everything comes back. Catalogues don't give much of a sense of audience size or orientation.

Mail art is another matter altogether. I have curated two very large Shadow Project shows, each of which had more than 300 participants. I'm not going to hazard a guess as to how many people have seen the larger shows I've curated, but they were certainly larger than the audiences for current literary magazines. I have heard of shows in other parts of the world in which thousands of people have visited spaces no larger than my living room to see mail art. The majority of the people who see these shows (here and abroad) are not writers or artists – they defy classification of any sort. I have had a couple pieces each of which has been in a number of large shows. These have apparently been seen by huge numbers of people. I'm sure the overwheming majority of those who saw my work in these shows don't remember my name. That doesn't mean that the work didn't make an impression on them or that they have forgotten it. Although there is a nascent hierarchy in mail art, the work, not the artist, is what matters most. It's interesting to note how many veteran mail artists don't sign their work, or sign it in a way that makes the signature hard to find or identify. This seems to me to be a healthy move away from the superstar system that some visual poets have tried to instigate. A lot of the people who participate in mail art shows either are conventional visual poets or were at one time. Perhaps mail art is the way visual poetry worked its way out of the corner into which it painted itself and is reaching larger and less predictable audiences than any other poetry now being produced. That's quite a switch from traditional visual poetry, which is probably the most scorned, despised, and ignored literary genre at the present time.

8. In addition to the ones mentioned, let me add books and the mail art network, and what I think of as Yankee Samizdat, the passing around of manuscripts in xerox. I have participated in a couple fax art shows. I'd like to see more publications circulated on computer disk (modem transmission is too vulnerable to viruses), but I don't see this happening much, and don't expect to in the near future.

10. Again, I'll refer the reader to *Painted Images*. But I'll just put forward one proposition. In *Alphabets Sublime*, a collection of interviews edited by George Myers, Jr., Alison Knowles says: "The reason for doing this is to ask people to see clearly and afresh each moment . . . We have to perceive with our own selves, eyes, ears, nose and throat." Visual poetry has been asking that of its readers for several thousand years. Other arts ask the same thing, but the request in visual poetry is part of its essence and structure: readers unwilling to see clearly and afresh each moment and unwilling to perceive with all their capacities will not be able to decipher the poetry at all. There is no better gestalt breaker among any of the arts. Visual poetry is a liberator at a time when the "mind forged manacles" Blake spoke of weigh particularly heavy on everyone, including those of us living in imperial states. If you think mind forged manacles are an empty conceit or hyperbole, consider the misery inflicted by S&L fraud in the U.S., or the victims of Brasil's inflationary spirals.

11. This is a funny one. I've gone for years without making a cent from my visual poetry. Mail art is inherently anti-commercial, and since my main efforts in this genre have been involved with social issues ranging from nuclear war to racism, it would be obscene to make money from it. On the other hand, some of my book art has sold for high prices. For most visual poetry appearing in books and magazines I have simply received contributor's copies, just like most visual poets. At times I have received honoraria or payments. It's all in the dice. In Egyptian mythology, Thoth, the patron of writing, was also lord of the dice. So too with many other mythologies. The thing that's funny about this question is imagining what a diagram of my visual poetry income over the years would look like – ¿a roller coaster? – naw, too many long stretches at ground level.

12. This answers something left over from the previous question. I have never sought or accepted a government grant for my own work, though I have taken part in organizations that have (such as Water Street Arts Center and Woodland Pattern). During a number of years when I worked as a printer, a lot of my clients were people who paid me with money they'd received as grants, and this may be the case in future jobs I work on. I don't trust government granting organizations. Events of the last two years confirm this with a vengeance. In an ideal polis, government wouldn't have to finance art because art would be completely integrated in the lives of just about everybody. Since that ideal polis isn't about to be formed, I think government should subsidize the arts, which is the same thing as saying it should subsidize visual poetry. I have received money from private individuals and private organizations. I'm all for it. Of course, as with everything else, if somebody you have no reason to trust is offering you something with one hand, watch the other hand with all you've got. I have had the good fortune to find a few private individuals whom I can trust. But that, too, is simply a matter of the dice.

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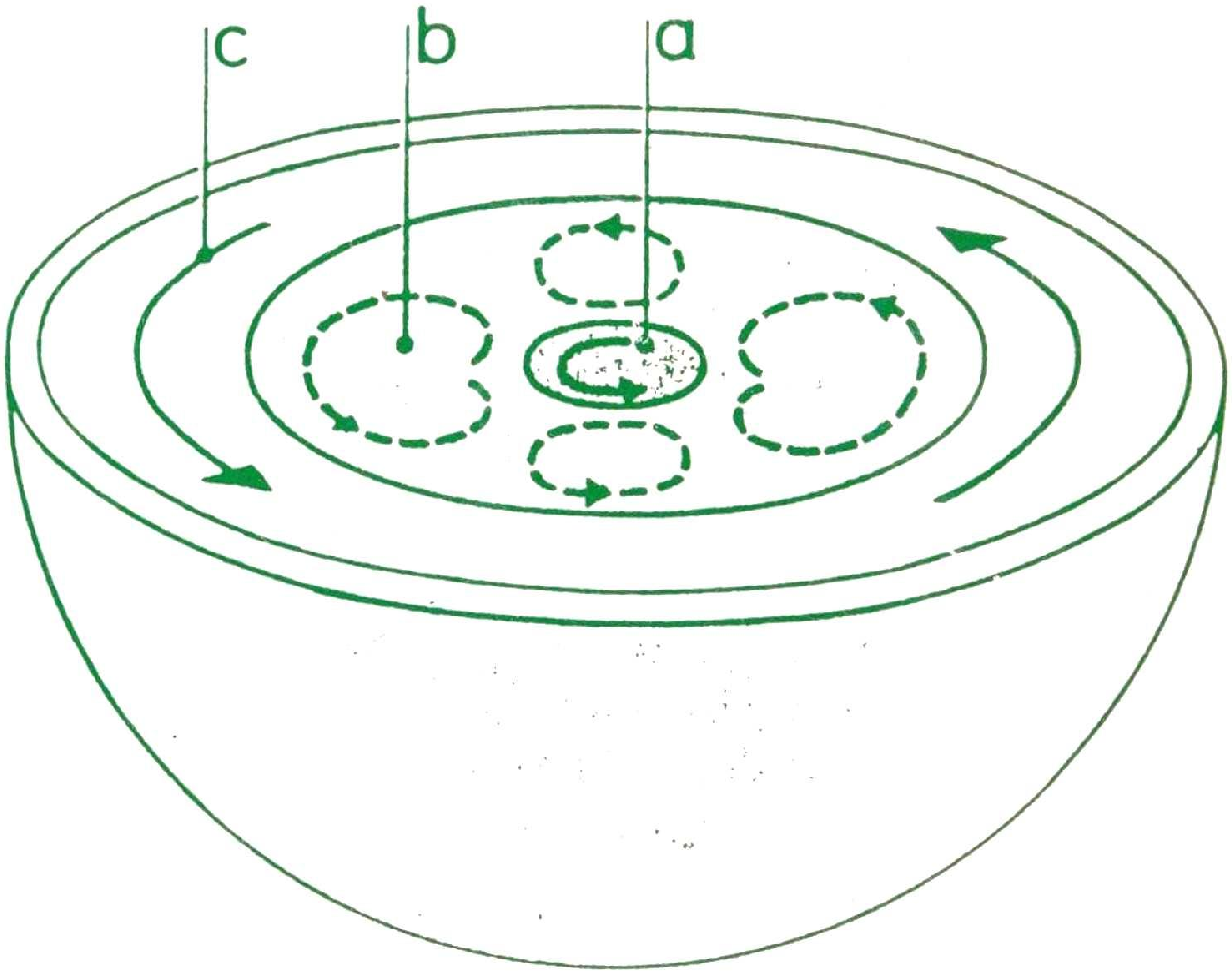

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